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ORLETON MANOR.

THE MYSTERY

OF

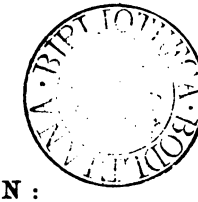
ORLETON MANOR.

BY

ROBERT JEWELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PREFACE.

A MEMBER of Parliament, on one occasion, having risen to address that assembly, assured the House that, although he had, during his career, faced many dangers calculated to try his nerve and courage, yet he never had felt so thoroughly terrified as he did at that moment at the sound of his own voice.

It is with similar feelings that the Author takes his pen to write the introduction to this, his first work. He feels as though he were on his feet, making a set speech to the most critical, and he humbly trusts the most indulgent, assembly in the world—the Public. No one is more sensible than he of the weakness, the shortcomings, of his story. But he has endeavoured to show that his hero possesses the instincts of an English gentleman—preferring rather to suffer than to do wrong. He has tried to hold up the impulses of generous youth—its slips, its back-slidings, its conceits—as little affairs to be regarded with leniency, if not actually

winked at; and that large-hearted charity, which neither thinketh nor speaketh ill, as a crown beautifying and glorifying its wearer. And with the hope that his readers are largely endowed with that quality which covers a multitude of sins, he acknowledges himself a miserable sinner, throws himself on the mercy of the court, and casts forth his first literary bantling, to sink or swim, as the Critics and the Public shall decide.

THE LYDIATES COTTAGE, BRIMFIELD,
HEREFORDSHIRE, *June 12th*, 1876.

ORLETON MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

EVERYONE knows Grass-shire, and everyone in Grass-shire knows Orleton Manor. Grass-shire is eminently a land of beeves, and more beef is grown there than on the same number of acres in any other part of England. It is a county full of natural beauties, of green meadows watered by trout streams, and shaded with noble timber—a county of loyal squires and substantial yeomen living on and farming their own land, from generation to generation.

Among all the old families of squires and yeomen, many of whom had lived in the same manor houses for three hundred years, none were of older pedigree, or had less encumbered estates, than the Burtons of Orleton Manor. They had been born, had lived, quarrelled, got drunk, and died in the same house, the eldest sons after their fathers, from the time of Elizabeth. And though they had quarrelled, drunk hard, and had married

here, the estate never grew less. The faculty of acquisition had been handed down from father to son. When the son succeeded the father, he also succeeded to the happy knack of keeping things together. In the troubles of Charles the First's time, the Burton then in possession held aloof until the battle of Edgehill had been lost and won, and then avowed himself a Parliamentarian and Puritan, was heartily cursed by his neighbours, sang psalms through his nose, and died worth more than he had inherited. *His* successor shouted "long live Charles the Second," went to Court, wrote scandalous doggerel verses, voted for the Exclusion Bill in Parliament, and when James the Second succeeded his brother, squared matters by regularly attending mass at the Chapel Royal when in town, and marrying his son to a Roman Catholic young lady, whose mother, the wits of that age said, had in her youth been on terms of tender friendship with the Duke of York. This son in his turn, after the battle of the Boyne, had declared for King William and the Protestant succession, converted his wife, and swore he was a zealous churchman. So this race of trimmers lived and prospered, adding field to field, and acre to acre, until John Burton, bachelor, was the master of Orleton Manor, and owed no man a penny.

Mr. John Burton, or old Squire Burton, as he was generally called, had the reputation of being a hard man. That reputation was certainly deserved in a great measure. He had never been known by the outside world, even in his youth, to give way to generous impulses. He paid his labourers the

lowest possible wages, and exacted the utmost amount of service from them. He was no sportsman, his neighbours affirmed, for he sold what little game was on his estate. If he rode to hounds, it was only that he might get a better price for his horse. 'Tis true he sometimes got drunk; but drunkenness in his case they declared was a vice, for he did not take his bottle with a friend and roll sociably under the table, but drank his strong ale at dinner, and his brandy-and-water at night alone. To get drunk in company was but an amiable weakness—a little failing to be mentioned with tenderness, and winked at. But solitary drinking was a damnable sin. Moreover, the man was wealthy and becoming wealthier. He did not spend half his income, and his estate hadn't a penny on it; while many of his neighbours spent three hundred pounds for every two of their income, and were often pushed hard to raise money to pay the interest of their mortgages. I take it this was his greatest sin in their eyes. It is a perfect crystal that has no flaw, and it is equally true the pitcher must be very much cracked that will hold no water; and this man, whose nature was so hard and cross-grained that almost all who knew him disliked him, was capable of some good. He loved after a fashion the son of his dead brother Tom, with whom he had quarrelled when that brother was alive. There had been no good blood between them then. But Tom had gone with his regiment to the West Indies, and after spending his private means and mortgaging his commission, gave his wife and boy his blessing, which was all he had to give, and left them and a

considerable amount of debt to his brother John. When John Burton received the news of his brother's death, he said it was strange that the younger sons of his family should always develop a tendency to go to the devil, and that the creditors might recover from poor Tom's estate, if he had any, and if not, they might sue each other, for not one penny would he pay them. The widow and boy, however, he would look to. If he should never marry—and he was not much of a marrying man—he said, little Tom would be heir to Orleton Manor, and as such, "I'm dashed if he shan't be edicated like a gentleman."

So John Burton sent for his brother's widow and her little son to the Manor House, and vowed for poor Tom's sake, though they had quarrelled, he would be a brother to her, and a father to her boy. "I aint much of a ladies' man, sister," he said to her on her arrival, "and I don't go gallivanting about the country like most of 'em hereabouts, but I'll try and make you comfortable anyhow. And maybe, sister, you'll find me rough and uncultivated like; but you see I've spent most of my time with nobody about me but the farm folks, and see nobody of a night but th' bailiff. I'm not like poor Tom, who was a gentleman, and married a lady, and could talk on a'most anything. An' I'm too old to learn new manners, for I'm come forty last birthday. You'd a' thought me older, now wouldn't you?" he continued, with a chuckle. "I am older too than my years, but a' that comes o' thinking and scheming, maybe for your little boy there. An' though I'm not much of the sort o' gentleman of them hereabouts, with their horses an' hounds, and their

estates mortgaged for as much as they're worth, we'll make a gentleman of *him* anyhow."

The widow, however, pined and grew thinner every day. "I'm afraid, John," she said, "I shall not trouble you long. My cough gets worse, and I daily become weaker. You'll be good to my boy when I'm gone, wont you, brother?"

"Dear me!" he would reply, "don't go an' talk like that. Just when I'm getting comfortable, you talk of dying. You'll soon get over that cough, and we'll have the old house done up, and made as smart as can be. The spring 'll soon be here, and there's that mortgage on old Cantrip's place falls in in April, and then perhaps we'll have a carriage as grand as any o' them, and go a visiting, and dine at six o'clock. Now don't you go to talk like that any more, just to please me. And I think I'll go and smoke my pipe in the kitchen."

The dreary months of winter passed away. The old manor house was made smart outside. The dark oak wainscotings and floors were polished, and a suite of rooms in the lumbering old place were expensively furnished. The mortgage on Cantrip's place was foreclosed, and a carriage was sent home to the manor house, in which the invalid took her drives. But when the May flowers bloomed in the gardens and meadows, and Nature began to look beautiful, another tablet was to be seen in the old church, to the memory of the widow of the late Captain Thomas Burton, commemorating her virtues, and the sorrow of her son and brother.

The new furniture was clothed in brown holland, the suite of rooms locked up, the carriage sold,

and John Burton sat with his little nephew on his knee, smoking his pipe, and staring at the dying embers of the fire.

"This be a most contrary and cussed world!" he muttered, as he took his pipe from his mouth. "Most contrary and cussed. An' the most contrary thing in it is a woman. No sooner do I get fond of her pale face and quiet ways, than she goes an' dies, and leaves me with this ere orphan. Poor little Tom! I dunno what I'm to do with'ee, I'm sure."

He sat long into the night, smoking pipe after pipe, ruminating on the perverseness of human nature, and of woman in particular, with the boy fast asleep on his knee. At last he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, took the orphan in his arms, and smoothing back the hair from his forehead, said, "Poor little chap! 'tis a hard world that one like thee should be left to the care of a rough man! I must get a governess for thee."

CHAPTER II.

The morning after John Burton had come to the conclusion that a governess was necessary for the care of little Tom, he rose at daybreak as full of the idea as ever. There was no doubt about its being the best possible thing that could be done. "Women are queer and contrary," he said to himself while shaving, "and some o' them uncommonly soft; but there's nothing like a woman for understanding young children. They put them right; and if they are ladies, they make little gentlefolks of the young ones. There, now I've done it. Cut my throat with a vengeance. It'll take six penn'orth of court-plaster to stop that. However," he continued, "we must have a lady about here for the boy. I've seen many a lad spoiled in the stables, but never a one in the drawing-room."

He was out of doors before any of his workmen had arrived. "I need no time-book," he used to say, "to be filled up by my bailiff with a parcel of lies. I see my men come in the morning and leave at night. Your own eyesight is the best time-book."

Under the master's eyes, where every operation would be sharply criticised, things went on like

clock-work. He saw the cattle in the yards and sheds fed, and then remarked to his bailiff, "It's time that twenty-acre field was finished. You've had two teams at work there for the last ten days. I call it slow work when you don't plough an acre a day."

"It be that, Squire," replied the bailiff. "But that field be very hilly, and her's tremendous stiff clay land."

"Well, I'll go and see how they're getting on. You tell Betty I'll be back to lunch by ten o'clock; and if anyone calls, you know where I'm gone."

He strolled through the fold yard, and following a footpath which led along the river side through the meadows, made his way towards a large field of arable land which lay alongside of a bank. It was cold enough for a frost, he thought; but the air, instead of being bright and crisp, seemed heavy and dull. There was no distance in it. "I am either getting near-sighted," he said to himself, as he came to the stile which led into the field where the two teams were at plough, "or else we shall have a fall of snow. I feel almost sure it will be snow, and there's a good two acres of this piece to finish yet. I say, you!" he called out to the labourers, who were creeping along the bank between the stilts of the plough at that horrible pace so well known in agricultural districts. "I say, you! what are you at there? Do you mean to stop in that furrow all day? Darn me if I hanna' been watching you for an hour, and you hanna moved above ten yards."

It takes a good deal to wake up the smallest par-

ticle of enthusiasm in Grass-shire. Neither hard words nor soft speeches can do it. The only spell that was ever known to work on the apathy of the labouring population was cider. Cider was the labourers' meat, drink, raiment, and religion. So that John Burton touched the only chord in their nature, when he promised them each an extra quart of their favourite beverage if they finished the piece that night. And as he sat on the stile watching the teams step out freer and with some appearance of moving, his mind reverted back to his dead brother—to their boyhood, their quarrel, caused, it must be confessed, by the dead man's extravagance—to the widow and orphan left to his care. And his heart felt full of pity and tenderness, such as he had never felt before for any living thing, for the child of his dead brother. And he again vowed he would be a father to the lad. Then he began to feel a vague dread of some evil, and fell into a train of thought evidently not of the pleasantest, if one might judge by his bent brows, and the savage manner in which he bit the twig he was carrying in his mouth. He sat with his body bent, his elbows resting on his knees, while his strong jaw was upheld on either side by a large bony hand. He sat in this form until long after it was time to return to his lunch. At last he raised his head as though he had thought out a very intricate problem, and had come to a final conclusion, and said aloud, "What must be, must be! Make your bed and lie on it; and it's hard if the devil canna look after the devil's spawn."

"What is that you were saying, Mr. Burton?" asked a voice behind him.

The speaker was a young man of about thirty years of age, tall, broad chested, and of a ruddy complexion. In spite of clothes which were cut after the style affected by clergymen of the Church of England, he looked a man who could hold his own either over a country or over a bottle; and the big, well-bred chestnut on which he was mounted looked as much like going as the rider.

"What were you saying, Mr. Burton?" inquired the speaker. "I thought I heard you mention the father of lies."

John Burton rose from his seat, and extending his hand to the new comer, said, "Hullo, parson, is it you? Good morning to you. I think we shall have some snow. I was wondering when the deuce those fellows would finish this piece. Eleven days ploughing twenty acres. And look at that furrow. Hang me! if I could'na drive a straighter one blindfolded. An' how is your good lady. She does look well mostly, to be sure."

"Mrs. Althorpe is very well, thank you," said the parson. "By the way, we were talking about you and your little nephew last night, and so I thought I would ride over and see you. You will find him a serious charge, Burton."

"Oh, the charges don't signify," replied the Squire. "We beant so poor but we can manage to keep our own nevvy."

"You mistake me," said the parson, laughing. "Everybody knows you could support a whole infant school, as far as money went. What I mean is, the lad will want looking after, and that, I take it, is not much in your line."

"Well, think I've settled that too," replied the Squire. "It is a most serious thing for a man like me to have the care of a baby, as you may say. But we'll pull through, depend on it. Are you coming my way, parson? I'm just going to have a snack o' something, and I daresay we can find a glass of ale and some bread and cheese for you, if it beant too early."

"Thank you, I'll come. The truth is, I rode over on purpose to speak to you on this subject."

"We'll talk it over our lunch then, parson. That's a nice nag you're on! I should say he could gallop a bit, sure-ly."

"Yes, he is pretty good," said the parson. "Not fast enough to win a race, you know. That isn't much in my way. But he can carry me well forward in a quick run; and he must be pretty good to do that."

"Indeed, that's true. You ride seventeen stun, I'll be bound," said the Squire, running his eye over his companion's massive form.

"Seventeen stun seven! and when we both mean it, few of them can show us their heels over this country, I can tell you," replied the parson, with some pardonable pride. There was no brag in this, for he could ride, and he knew it.

"I havn't seen you out this last season," he continued. "It has been the best I've known for some years. The November frosts cleared the fences and blind ditches, and we've had open weather ever since. And *such* scent."

"No; I don't find time somehow, now," replied the Squire. "Things want a master's eye on 'em.

Fancy, them fellows have been eleven days ploughing twenty acres. It's enough to ruin a man. And then poor Tom's wife! Her's been ill all the winter, an' took an' died just when fine weather was coming on. It's a contrary world, parson. I'm right glad, though, you've had some sport. You're a good judge of what sport is, sure-ly, and know a horse better than anyone hereabouts. I'd like your opinion, by-and-by, of a filly I've got in the stable; an', indeed, I'd rather follow your opinion than my own about a horse, any day. She'd carry you, I should say, alarming."

"Well then, here we are. Shall we look at her now, Squire, or after lunch?"

Now, John Burton in his time had sold many horses, and knew from long experience the difference between a customer's bid before and after lunch. He never knew a tankard of old October, followed by a few glasses of brown sherry, make against the sale of a horse. His experience taught him that buyers in most cases regarded the animal they inspected more favourably through the medium of the rosy god. So he said:

"We'll have a bit o' something and a glass o' sherry first, and talk over that as you are come about. The nag will keep."

So the parson accompanied the Squire through a grand old hall—the best room in the house, the proprietor said—wainscoted in dark oak to the ceiling, and ornamented with antlers, on which hung hunting crops long disused, fishing baskets, and other sporting gear, into the dining-room, a long, low room, with windows opening out on park-like pastures.

"Now parson," said the Squire, seating himself, "help yourself; you'll find that cheese good, though I say it who shouldn't. We make everything we eat ourselves, and that's the way to make money. There's some good ale, and there's the sherry—plenty of both. But if you'll take my advice, you'll wash down the cheese with the ale, and wind up with a few glasses o' wine."

"Now then, Burton," said the parson, helping himself to the sherry, "let us come to the point. What about the boy? You can't keep him here without some one to look after him, that's certain. He would learn nothing but what he should not learn. You're a busy man, and have a deal to attend to, so that the chances are he would soon be more at home in the stable than in a lady's drawing-room; and very few schools, take my word for it, are worse. The lad is a fine little fellow, and may have the making of a good man in him, for the breed is right on both sides. What do you intend doing with him? That's the point!"

"Yes, that's the pint, sure enough," replied the Squire. "You don't mind my having a pipe, do you, parson? I can somehow think better when I'm smoking."

"By no means. I—I don't mind if I join you! It's not my practice, you know, to smoke so early, but for this once—eh, Burton?" And the parson produced a very black meerschaum, and began to smoke with much gusto.

After smoking in silence for some time, the Squire said, "Yes, sure enough, that's the pint. And it's a pint quite cal'clated to puzzle any or'nary

man, parson. I've thought it over, though, and looked at it on every side, and consequently come to a conclusion."

"And what conclusion have you come to?" asked the parson.

"I shall get a governess for him. Some nice young woman who can keep him out o' mischief, teach him to read and write, mind his manners, and say his prayers," replied the Squire, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "An' I think you'll say a very good conclusion too."

The parson laid down his pipe with evident vexation. "My good sir," he said, "you can't seriously mean what you say!"

"I do, though," the Squire said. "It was a serious affair thinking and puzzling my brains to come to that conclusion; but having come there, there I'll stick until I see something better. An' what have you got to say again' it, parson?"

"Why, my dear fellow, there are a host of things to say against it. A woman, however good she may be, cannot manage boys. They either get to care nothing for her, or else she makes them milksops. In the former case she's worse than useless, and the lad would be hand and glove with the groom and keeper, and a pretty young blackguard they would make him in time. And in the latter case you had better put him in frocks, and call him Miss."

"There may be something in what you say, parson! I'll not deny it. But the lad is young. Why he's hardly come five yet!"

"Well, there's another reason yet," said the

parson. "It is not good to have young ladies in a house where there is no mistress. You are a young man, Squire, and people are uncharitable."

"That's true," chuckled the Squire. "I doubt me though, parson, you're a bit of a humbug."

"Not at all," the parson protested. "Old Cantrip is a case in point. You know how the whole neighbourhood talked about him and his daughter's companion, and he's seventy if he's a day, and the girl was not more than seventeen."

"He deserved it, I'll bet a hundred pound," said the Squire. "He always was loosish, I understand. I've heard my father tell some rum tales about him. Why the old rogue tried to take me in over that last mortgage. Swore there was tin on the estate, and offered to kiss the book to it, an' no more tin there than in his pocket. He! he! why he'll do anything."

"It would not be wise of you, you may depend," the parson went on. "The boy would not thrive alone in this old place, without companions of his own age. Now, I'll tell you what I would do, if I were you. I would send him to school."

"That's nonsense, parson. The boy is too young. He'd be killed in one term. I was at a public school myself, and although I was some years older than Tom, it would a' bruk my heart, if I hadna' been as tough as the devil, saving your presence," the Squire said.

"But you can send him to a preparatory school, where lads of his age are prepared for the public schools. There is no fagging there, and he'd be all

the better for it in health and spirits. The lad is fretting now, I can see," the parson urged.

"All in good time, parson; but we'll try the governess first. Try another glass o' sherry."

"Thank you; I never can smoke a dry pipe. But I say, Burton, if you are determined to have a governess in the house, don't engage the woman I saw hanging about here last night. I saw her peering through the dining-room window. My wife has noticed her, too, and she fancies most horrible things will happen if you keep the lad here. Women are very imaginative, I know; but I would order her off if I were you."

"The impudent jade," replied the Squire. "Hang me! I'm a magistrate, and I'll commit her if I catch her about the place. What was she like, parson?"

"I did not see her sufficiently to describe her," said the parson. "But Mrs. Althorpe saw her plainly, and says she is a tall, handsome, gipsy-looking woman, with an immense quantity of black glossy hair, and, as far as she could judge, of about thirty years of age."

The Squire sat staring at the parson, with his pipe partly raised to his mouth. As Mr. Althorpe remarked that evening to his wife, he looked like a man who had just received a stunning blow. Recovering himself, he hastily swallowed two or three glasses of wine, and then said, "Well parson, I believe your advice is good. Suppose you look out for a school for the young one. You must keep it quiet, though, or Betty will be always sending him cakes, if she knew where he was. And now we'll look at the nag."

The stables were visited, but the parson did not buy. He found out the bay's faults, which was not to be wondered at, seeing that he was a consummate judge of a horse. But what *was* really wonderful, the Squire took no pains to show the animal off, to call the parson's attention from her weak to her good points, nor even to mention her pedigree. This, however, may be accounted for on the supposition that he was thinking very little about the bay filly, and a good deal about the dark woman who had been seen looking in at his windows after dusk.

CHAPTER III.

The Squire paid but little attention to his farm that day after the parson had left. He was evidently worried and out of humour. He snarled at the servants, and cursed the labourers more heartily than usual when they came in his way. He seemed also but ill at ease. Fifty times he went to where his dead brother's boy was at play, and after looking at him, as though to see he was safe, would go away again. A new feeling had taken possession of him—a feeling such as he had never experienced before. Never in his brother's lifetime had he been solicitous about his heir, or who should come after him. Up to that time his sole passion was making money. And he had made money. He was rich when he had succeeded to the estate, and had ever since been becoming richer. And now, the man who had felt but the slightest interest in his heir, when that heir was his brother—the man who, before he would pay that brother's debts, compelled him to agree to cut off the entail—had been changed in almost every feeling by the pale face of a woman, who under any circumstances could have been nothing to him, and who was now dead, and by the artless prattle of a young child. He now felt the

lad was more to him than his land or his riches, that to rob him of that boy would be to make him a broken man,—a bankrupt in heart. The lad was to him not only his brother's son—that counted for little—but he was his very self. He would live again in *him*. He would go on heaping up wealth, that the lad should enjoy it. He was his creation, in a worldly sense, and through him the Burtons of Orleton Manor should carry their heads as high, and flutter as gaily, as any family in the county. The boy would grow up, and marry, and become the leading man in Grass-shire, and he, John Burton, who was looked down on by his neighbours, and disliked by both poor and rich, would have made him. It was a new ambition, and, to say truly, it was sanctified by love; for the hard man loved the child. And now he had his misgivings. All his plans and hopes might be frustrated. A Nemesis was following him, and the sins committed in the flesh might be punished in the flesh.

That night the boy's cot was removed from his own bedroom into his uncle's, and placed beside his uncle's bed. The Squire had him with him as soon as daylight began to fade, and held him sleeping on his knee, while he smoked and stared at the burning logs on the hearth. The hard lines on his really handsome face softened as he thought of what the lad should be; and there he sat building castles in the air, the foundation of which was a child whose health might depart, or whose nature might be such as to turn that life into a curse instead of a blessing.

At his usual hour he rose to go to bed; but

before leaving the room, he opened the shutters and looked out of the window into the cold night. The snow was falling in heavy flakes, but in the darkness he thought he saw a figure moving swiftly away. "A cold night for watching, my lady," he muttered, as he bolted the shutters and lighted his candle. "But it's little you or any of your race care for cold when any devilry is hatching. However, let me get this off my mind, an' I must ha' a talk with you I suppose. But you must wait."

At breakfast time the next morning, while Mr. Althorpe sat chipping his egg and casting his eyes down the columns of the *Times*, the Squire drove up with little Tom in his dog-cart to the parsonage. "Hullo, Squire!" the parson said, meeting him at the door of the breakfast room, "you are up early. Just in time for breakfast, if we're not too late for you. And how are you, Master Tom? going to school soon I hope, eh?"

"That's just it, parson. Good morning, ma'am. Needn't ask after your health, your looks are enough, any day; and I don't mind if I do pick a bit, for the air makes one uncommon sharp, sure-ly."

So the Squire and his little nephew sat down and began their second breakfast; for, as the former said, "travelling through the snow, with a cold wind blowing, brought luncheon time two hours sooner than it was due."

"I hope," said Mrs. Althorpe, entering on the business at once, "you have made up your mind to send this little fellow to school, Mr. Burton. Though my husband says I am foolish, yet I have not been easy about him since I saw that woman lurking

about your place. I dare say I am very stupid, but ladies, you know, are allowed to indulge their fancies at the expense of their reason."

"Indeed then, ma'am," the Squire replied, "an' there's many as would be glad to see Orleton without an heir. But I'll disappoint them, I will. Tom's son shall succeed his uncle, or I'll know why."

"You have no reason to put any faith in my wife's fancies, I hope, have you?" said the parson. "You cannot imagine the person whom we saw at your windows has any design on the child. I regret I said anything to you about it."

"Oh, not at all," replied the Squire. "Only you see there's nothing like being on the safe side. Any design on my nevvy, indeed! I'd like to see them. Hang me! but I'd soon commit 'em; begging your pardon, ma'am."

"Are you quite sure now?" asked Mrs. Althorpe.

"Positive, ma'am," replied the Squire. "Only I've been thinking about it all night, and I couldn't sleep. I dunno but there might be something in what you say, so I'm determined to make it all right. Now," continued the Squire, looking from one to the other rather foolishly, "it's a pervarse man as won't guard against contingencies, and the world is a wicked world. Some one *might* have a grudge again' me, or the estate, or, for that matter, my nevvy. You remember the babes in the wood, ma'am, though that can't apply, as there's no wicked uncle in the case except me. Now, if anyone *should* have sich a grudge again' any one of we three, they might try and smuggle SOMEBODY off. So I've determined to put a mark on that SOMEBODY, that

each of us here present could swear to if it was a hundred years to come. An' now 'tis all out, and you know all about it."

"Good gracious, Squire!" cried the lady, holding up her hands, "can it be possible? What can you mean?"

The parson merely looked hard at his friend, and made a mental vow that he would on some future occasion take an opportunity of preaching against the evils of drinking before breakfast.

"I mean what I say, ma'am, asking your pardon. I may say I mean more'n I say, for I've already put a mark on SOMEBODY while he was asleep; and I want each of you to witness it and sign it, so that it shall stand good for a hundred year. An' I wouldn't ha' missed putting that mark on that SOMEBODY for a thousan' pound. Don't you see how Tommy is rubbing his shoulder?" continued the Squire.

"Good Heavens, Burton!" said the parson, "you don't mean to say——"

"I do, though," interrupted the Squire. "Come here, Tommy." And hastily unfastening the little fellow's dress he bared his white skin, and showed the astonished parson, and his no less astonished wife, his tiny shoulder, on which he had neatly but indelibly tattooed the two letters "T. B."

"I gave him a sleeping draught last night," said the Squire. "And now, parson, you and your good lady sign this document, which says what I've done, with the date and everything all straight, an' I'll defy heaven and earth to prevent me from knowing my nevvy an' heir, if it's fifty year to come."

So the Squire left the parsonage that morning a good deal easier in his mind, as he said, than when he had entered it. Everything was straightforward now. His nephew carried a mark on him which would prove to all the world that he was the heir of John Burton, and absolutely belonged to the Orleton estate. He then drove to the market town of Baswold, had his will made by the family solicitor, and the marks by which the world should be shown, if necessary, that the bearer of those marks was his nephew, attested.

"This is rather a strange freak of yours, Squire," said Mr. Gaunt, the man of deeds and conveyances. "Your nephew here would succeed to Orleton Manor without your making a will, as he is heir-at-law. But as to this tattooing business, it passes my comprehension."

"Never mind," replied the Squire. "In my day I've had few freaks of any sort, so we'll say this is one of the few. The thing is done, and all we have to do is to say nothing about it. I don't see how it can spoil him, considering that folks go about dressed now-a-days; some of them too much so, especially the women. It is not likely the lad will be showing his shoulder to the public, so that few will be the wiser. On the other side, it may be the making of him. And now I'll say good day."

"Well, good day, Squire. But before you go, Mr. Cantrip has been with me lately; he says if you'll advance him the sum of the mortgage you foreclosed last month, he'll give you five per cent. for it."

"Not a penny, Gaunt. You know he never pays

interest or anything else; and it was more than the unencumbered part of the estate was worth. He pay five per cent.! Why he has put off paying the debt of natur', which is about the only one he ever will pay, until his nearest relatives are disgusted."

"Very well; I'll tell him should he call again, which, I think, is pretty certain," said Mr. Gaunt. "But you had better stop to dinner, Squire. We dine at six sharp, and it's past four now. A glass of sherry and a biscuit will keep you going until then."

"Thank'ee, I'm sure," the Squire replied. "But we must be home by six, and travelling is bad, and the nights are dark. Besides, I've some more business to get through before I go to bed."

"Well then, I'll not detain you. Good-bye, Squire."

"Good-bye, Gaunt, and rec'lect what you've signed and witnessed."

It was quite dark when they arrived at the manor-house, and both the Squire and little Tom were cold and stiff. A blazing fire, which roared and crackled on the hearth in the dining room, soon restored their circulation, and their dinner was immediately served. The lad was hungry, and ate like most healthy boys do after a seven hours' fast.

"Dear me, how he do eat, sure-ly!" said the Squire, looking at his nephew with pride. "Indeed, an' he's a Burton, every inch of him. Very few families hereabouts could ever match the Burtons at knife and fork. Do you like it, Tommy?"

"Yes, uncle," Tommy replied.

"Can you do some more, Tommy?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Beef or pudden, Tommy?"

"Beef, uncle!"

"That's right, Tommy. You stick to beef, an' beef will stick to you. There's nothing like it in the whole worl'. I've growed a sight of beef. The man as can feed two bullocks where only one was fed before, is a man to be loved an' worshipped. An' the man as invented swedes and mangolds is a public benefactor. I've done a deal of good in my time, Tommy, whatever people may say of me."

"They are wicked people who say naughty things about you, arn't they, uncle?" asked Tommy.

"Oh, yes! monstrous wicked, Tommy," replied the Squire. "They'll say anything; an' all because I make 'em pay up, and save my money, which is for you some day. They take their pleasure in spending their money, Tommy. But they're wrong. *That* pleasure is soon gone. Your poor father didn't find there was much fun in it, towards the end; an' it's the way with all of 'em. There's many pleasures to be had in this worl', Tommy, but generally speaking you've got to pay for 'em. Some are wicked pleasures, an' they carry their own punishment. A few are innocent; but of all the innocentest pleasures in this worl', *an'* the most lasting, is making money, an' then keeping it."

"I like spending money best, uncle," says little innocence. "I turn my money-box upside down and shake the sixpences out."

"That's wrong, Tommy. Look after your sixpences—sovereigns look after themselves. But I'll teach you better in time," the Squire said.

Whether Tommy had eaten too much, or his uncle's discourse on the pleasures and vanities of life were provocative of somnolency, is uncertain. Perhaps it was a little of both. But in any case the effect was the same. Tommy began to feel sleepy. The Squire, therefore, took him in his arms and carried him into the kitchen, placing him on the knee of his bailiff, who sat smoking exceedingly rank tobacco in front of the fire.

"There, my little man; you go to sleep a bit until I come back," said the Squire. And turning to the bailiff, he continued in a low tone, "Look you here, Ben, you know I'm a man o' my word: if you let a living soul come near my nevvy until I come back, I'll thrash every spark o' life out of yer body. I 'spect he's watched. If I come back an' find him all right, there'll be a pint of cider for thee."

"Be it th' woman?" asked Ben, slowly nodding his head towards the kitchen door. "Her as a' been hanging about here?"

"Yes," nodded the Squire.

"All right, Squire," Ben said. And he took out a huge clasp knife, and laid it open by his side. "Her'd better mind what her's at, that's all."

When the Squire returned to the dining-room, he found the lights had been extinguished. The long, low, dark wainscoated room looked darker and drearier than usual, the gloom being intensified by the glare from the burning logs on the hearth. Crouched on the floor, warming her hands at the fire, was the figure of a woman.

He first locked the door, placing the key in his pocket, and then walking to the sideboard filled two

wine glasses with brandy, one of which he drank. The other he carried towards the fire, and seating himself on a chair, said, "Well, Marion, you're come, are you? You find it cold hanging about the house as you've been a doing, I make no doubt. Here, drink this, an' I hope it'll make you decent an' agreeable."

The woman made no sign of having noticed his presence, but sat with her cloak drawn over her head, gazing into the flickering embers.

The Squire stared at the figure for some time without again speaking. At last he said, "You had better take it, lass! It won't be the first you've had at my expense, you know."

She waved him off with a magnificent gesture of her arm.

"Very well," he said, "fair an' easy goes a long way. I spoke you kindly, mind. Next time it's your turn."

The silence that ensued lasted for a considerable time. The only sound heard in the room was the loud ticking of the old clock in the hall, and the beating of the sleet against the window panes. The Squire was becoming nervous. He was alone in the room with a woman whose silence was extremely irritating. Some one of the servants might at any moment try to enter. She might be hatching mischief against him or those belonging to him, at his very hearth. And his conscience, too, began to call him to task.

"Confound the woman!" he at length broke out. "Why don't you say your say, an' begone? You can't stop here all night, you know."

The tall form slowly rose up from where it had crouched. The scarlet cloak which had been drawn about her fell to the floor, and she stood before him in all her voluptuous beauty. Truly she was a magnificent woman. In years, not more than thirty; in form, perfection, although on a somewhat large scale. Her dark flashing eyes, and the hot blood of her brown cheek, indicated her race; while from her imperial head descended in heavy masses her glossy hair, black as night. Her eyes were looking straight into his—eyes with a strange fascination in them—as she stood before him with all the bearing of a proud queen.

"John Burton," she said, "you are the father of my child."

"Maybe!" replied the Squire.

"I say again you are the father of my child," said the fierce beauty.

"An' I say again, maybe! I'll not deny, at any rate for the present, I may ha' some claim to that title."

"Liar as you are! hard man as you are! you cannot deny that," she said fiercely. "I am come to remind you of your promise."

"What promise, lass?" asked the Squire.

"The promise you gave me before you made me what I am. The promise you gave me before I became an outcast from my tribe for your sake—the promise that you would make me your wife."

"Nay, my lass," said the Squire, "there was no promise. There was an agreement, an' any lawyer will tell you, to make an agreement binding there must be two contracting parties. Hold now! it's

no use raising the house. I wouldna' be answerable for your safety if you were catched here. Now listen to me! I was saying as how there must be *two*—mark that now—two contracting parties to make an agreement binding. I promised that if the child you say is mine should be a boy, I'd marry you in spite of all of 'em. If it should be a girl, I promised to give her a thousand pound. You have not brought a boy, so it's idle talking. If you fail to perform your part o' th' contract, I'm not going to keep mine. The child is a girl, and the thousand pound is ready."

"Talk me none of your law," she said, while the lightning flashed from her splendid eyes. "I ask you for no law. I ask you to redeem your promise—the promise on which I staked my home, friends, and people. I ask you, John Burton, for the last time, do you intend owning me and our child?"

"An' I answer you, for the last time, I'll see you darned first," said the Squire. "No man can say of me I ever bruk my word. I'll stan' to my word with you. The child is a girl, and there's a hundred bank-notes of ten pound each in that parcel. You, who profess to tell fortins, ought to know your errand here was a fool's errand."

The fire of those eyes no longer, as they might have done some few short months before, flashed love on the Squire. There was another light in them now. The light of hatred. Her beautifully-cut nostril was curled in fierce anger, the veins of her throat were swollen, and there she stood looking at him like a very pythoness. Could she have

blasted him with a look, the Squire would have been lost.

Snatching his hand, she looked at the lines intently for a moment, then flung it from her with a gesture of loathing. "Fortune!" she said, in thick, quick, guttural tones, which gradually increased in volume and impetuosity as she continued, her beautiful arm stretched out towards him as if in denunciation: "Fortune! let me tell yours. A hard life shall end in a hard death. A lying tongue shall at the last see the truth and long to proclaim it, but shall be dumb. Cursed by your own blood, and cursed by the stranger. You are cursed in living, and will be cursed in dying. You shall lead the life of a dog, and die the death of one." And in a moment she had passed through the window out into the dark night.

The Squire stood for a moment as though to recover himself from the effects of the fierce denunciation he had just listened to. Then passing over to the window, he closed and bolted the shutters. When all was secure he made himself a glass of brandy and water, lighted his pipe, and sat himself down in front of the fire.

"It's wonderful," he said to himself, "how much I've been cursed in my time. I was cursed at school, and have been cursed ever since. I havn't found it's done much harm yet, though. What a beautiful devil she is! an' what a fool I was to be inveigled by her handsome face. That was a mistake, I do allow. A mistake, John Burton, that ha' cost you a thousand pound, an' how much more, who knows!"

CHAPTER IV.

For some days after the Squire's interview with Marion the gipsy, he was evidently much oppressed by some secret fear. He thought of her demand, and her denunciation. That she had hoped to become the mistress of Orleton Manor there was no question. The only point which was worth consideration was, would she be likely to indulge in revenge for her disappointment. That she was capable of revenge, no one who saw her could doubt; it was one of the characteristics of her race. They were swift to anger, and implacable in their hatred. She hated him, and he knew it; if she should endeavour to revenge her disappointment on him, where was the spot she would be likely to strike? She knew he loved his money, and his corn-stacks might be fired. That could be easily done, and the incendiary never be discovered. A match at midnight, and a fresh breeze, and the whole of his last harvest would be gone. That would be a terrible blow to a man whose pleasure consisted in making money and saving it. He must guard against that. He would have a watchman until he could thresh out, which should be done as soon as possible. A fire at the Manor farm would probably entail a loss of

thousands. Then there was the heir. If she tried to injure him at all, it would be in the spot which would be the most fatal to his happiness. He had heard of children having been stolen away from their homes by these very people. Might not she try to steal away his heir? This thought was not new to him. It had haunted him continually from the time of his having heard of her being about the place. It was that dread which had made him place the mark on his nephew by which he should be known in years to come. Her curses he cared little for. As he had said, he had had curses showered on him during the whole of his life, and was never the worse for them. But the boy on whom he now built all his hopes might be taken from him; then he would indeed be a desolate man. This, too, he thought, might be guarded against. The lad should never be alone. Some one should always be with him; he himself would take charge of him as much as possible, and as soon as he could arrange to send him away, the lad should be placed at school, and not even one of the servants should know where he was placed. Had he been older such caution would not have been needed; but the lad was young, and time could obliterate all his early impressions. If taken from him now, he would forget his birth, his name, and his relationship to the master of Orleton Manor. This was a terrible thought to him. To steal away his nephew would be a crime of the deepest dye. But to steal away his heir would be even worse. He did not so much regard his possessions as something that would in the course of time belong to the boy, as that the boy belonged

to, and was owned by, his lands, his beeves, and his gold.

So the watchman kept watch at night over the house, and yards, and buildings, and not unfrequently the Squire himself held his vigils throughout the cold nights. His labourers were instructed to give instant report should the gipsy or any of her race be seen in the neighbourhood, and little Tommy was never allowed to remain alone. All these precautions, however, seemed unnecessary. Neither Marion nor her people had been seen since her interview with the Squire. The watchman was never disturbed in his slumbers beneath the shelter of the cornstacks. The big yard dog reposed in his kennel unmoved. So the dread which had oppressed the Squire and his household gradually became less, and finally disappeared. The watchman was discharged, the yard dog was chained to his bench, and Tommy's cot was taken from his uncle's room to an adjoining chamber, and though the guardianship of the lad was not wholly removed, it was very much relaxed.

At length Mr. Althorpe had been able to recommend a school to which Tommy was to be sent. The evening before he was to leave the Manor-house, his uncle had him at dinner with him, and gave him much sage and worldly advice. He spoke to the lad of his future plans and hopes for him; of the position he would place him in as a man, and that in Tommy the old race should again shine in the county firmament. He told him of the vanity of all worldly pleasures, except the pleasure of heaping up wealth. "Money, Tommy," he

said, "is the best recommendation a man can have in this world. There is no lock money won't pick. It'll open to you any position you may fancy. Even a plain old man like me, Tommy, could go and flutter among the best of 'em to-morrow, if I'd a mind for such vanities. But I shall leave all that to you, my lad. Only don't forget this, that without money you are nobody; but with the heap I'll make for you, you will be able to be anything you like. Money, Tommy, is the best friend, the best father, the best brother, a man can have. As long as you've got money you'll have friends, and it'll be a whole family of relations to thee to boot."

The bailiff's wife, who had the particular charge of the lad, was then summoned, and Tommy, having eaten of his favourite food, the juicy beef for which Orleton Manor was celebrated, until he could eat no longer without some danger and much inconvenience, was packed off to bed. The Squire then mixed his brandy-and-water, put on his slippers, and sat down before a very jovial fire, that crackled and spluttered on the hearth in the most cheerful manner. He then lighted his pipe, and, as he blew out puff after puff of blue smoke, he fell into a curious train of thought. He had heard of ghosts in his young days, but had never believed in them. Had anyone told him they believed in the supernatural, he would have set them down as being little else than fools or maniacs. Grass-shire was certainly populated by a superstitious people, but the Squire had always set his face dead against ghosts. He had often vowed he would exorcise the best ghost that ever walked. Certain it is, that he

cured one of his farm hands of all acquaintance with them. The fellow, on being sent to see after some lambing ewes, away at the far end of the farm, late one night, returned very soon declaring he had seen the devil sitting on a stile. The Squire there and then had given him such a horsewhipping that he never saw another devil, or if he did, he never spoke of it. And yet he was now thinking of ghosts. He thought if it *were* true that the spirits of the departed ever visited the scenes of their days when in their earthly tabernacle, what a lot of relatives were probably walking about the old house then—many of them perhaps in that very room—some one of them, perhaps his grandfather, whose pigtail he had shortened while the old gentleman was enjoying his afternoon's nap, about thirty years before, might that minute be looking over his shoulder. And as this thought came into his mind, the Squire turned suddenly round, but seeing nothing more than his own shadow, he took a sip at his brandy-and-water, and laughed quietly. Then he refilled his pipe, and as certain as he puffed the blue smoke in wreaths about his head, so sure his thoughts went back to their starting point. "Suppose all the old fogies who had sat in this room were to come in and sit themselves round that table," he thought, "what a rum lot they would be, sure-ly. If one could only catch their portraits, it would make quite a book of reference as to the various costumes that have been in vogue for the last three hundred years. There would be a few saints, perhaps! a lot of sinners, I'm sartin. There was that blackguard who killed young Brandon unfairly in a duel. That was in

Charles the Second's time. He was a bad lot, he was. Then there was the fellow who managed to keep his head on his shoulders, and the estate together, during the Commonwealth, and after the Restoration. I admire that fellow; he knew what he was about. Dear me, how odd it would be if they were all of 'em to drop in promiscuous like."

Having arrived thus far, the Squire began to feel sleepy. "I make no doubt," he said to himself, "I had too much dinner. It cannot be the brandy-and-water, for I've only had three glasses. I think I'll pull the old sofa up in front of the fire and have forty winks, for the night's young yet."

So the Squire put fresh logs on the fire, pulled the old sofa round so that he might get the full benefit of the heat, and after unbuttoning his waistcoat and loosening his neckcloth, laid himself down, and in three minutes was sound asleep.

Now those readers who are not fond of sensational events had better skip the remainder of this chapter. I shall simply describe what took place, and what the Squire declared to the present writer he distinctly saw. But this description, even without any tricks of style or language, must be sensational, as are all relations of what has a supernatural appearance.

The Squire, then, lay down on the sofa and fell asleep. How long he slept he had no means of knowing, for the events of that night crowded themselves so swiftly on one another that he never thought of looking at his watch. Indeed, so little did he think about it, that the following day he found his watch had stopped, not having been wound up the

preceding night. However, when he awoke, he found the fire had burnt almost out, and the room felt cold. This, however, did not surprise him. But he *was* astonished to see standing just inside the dining-room door a dark handsome girl, apparently of about eighteen years of age. When he first saw her she was standing perfectly still, and he had every opportunity of noticing her. Her hair was black, and was drawn off her white forehead in heavy bands and fastened behind her head. Her brows were thick and straight until they arched and met on the bridge of her aquiline nose. Her eyes were of a peculiar grey, the colour of all the Burtons' eyes, and they looked fixedly in front of her. Her face was pale, the jaw firm and square, and the mouth set. Then he saw her glide nearer and nearer until she stood over him. Though he declared he felt no fear, but merely astonishment, his jaw dropped, and he saw her bring a phial close to his cheek as if to pour its contents into his mouth; but still keeping his eyes on her, he moved his head hastily to one side. This took place twice. The third time the phial touched him, and he felt a liquid trickle down his cheek, and a smell arose as of laudanum. In another second she was gone.

This was certainly enough to startle any man, even of the strongest nerves, but it was not all. As the Squire said, the devilry of that night had only then begun, for on rising he saw seated around the table the whole of his ancestors, as if their portraits had just stepped down out of their gold frames in the old gallery, where they had hung for generations. There they were in all sorts of costumes. There were bag

wigs, cavalier wigs, and pig-tails, laces, ruffles, and rapiers. At the head of the table sat an irascible-looking old gentleman, dressed in the costume of Elizabeth's time, whom the Squire recognised at once, from his portrait which hung in that very room, as the founder of the family.

As the Squire stood staring at the strange scene, the old gentleman rose from his seat, and pouring himself a glass of wine out of one of the Squire's cut-glass decanters, said, "Descendants, and gentleman all, with your good pleasure we will drink one toast. Here's to the memory of our house, whose glory and name will soon have departed."

Each one in that strange company drank the toast in silence. They then rose noiselessly from their seats and followed the first of their name, passing in turn before the Squire, to whom each bowed as men could bow a hundred years ago, saying, "The last of our race."

The strange pageant passed suddenly away, and the Squire found himself trembling and in darkness. Groping his way towards the window he drew back the curtains. Flashes of light were leaping across the window in quick succession. He stood one moment to collect his scattered thoughts, then, quick as lightning, he rushed from the room and seized the rope of the alarm bell, and sent out peal after peal on the startled night. "Now then," he shouted savagely, and with a strange exultation in his heart, as the scared and half-dressed men and women hastened into the hall, "Look alive there! Here's work for you! All hell is loose to-night! The ricks are on fire!"

Soon the alarm spread over the neighbourhood, and people from all quarters hastened to assist in extinguishing the fire. The engines arrived at a furious gallop from Baswold, and a continuous stream of water was poured on the burning stacks. Those who saw that fire said that the Squire worked like a lion, and behaved like a madman. At one moment he was seen as though in the very midst of the fire, and the next he would appear on the top of a burning rick, fork in hand, laughing like a fiend, and working like a hero. At last, when the morning was far advanced, their labours were over. The whole of the ricks were burnt, but the buildings and stock were saved.

Up until this moment the excitement of the strange scene he had gone through in the dining-room the preceding night, and afterwards of the fire, had engrossed every other feeling. But now that excitement was over he thought of his nephew and heir.

"Where is the lad?" he asked eagerly of his servants, as he held a pitcher of cider to his parched mouth. "What!" he shouted. "Heaven and earth! hanna ye seen him?"

No! no one had seen him since he was put to bed the night before. The Squire, with a furious oath, dashed the pitcher to the ground, and rushing into the house, burst his way into the child's room.

The lad was gone.

CHAPTER V.

When Mrs. Hogget, the bailiff's wife, took Tommy to bed, he was very sleepy. There is no doubt he had eaten too much beef and pudding, and the effects of his dinner and of his exposure to the cold air in the Squire's dog-cart were such that he could scarcely keep his eyes open while he was being undressed. During the whole of the time of disrobing, his head went nod, nod. He begged off being washed, remarking he would be washed twice the next morning instead, as he was *so* sleepy and *so* cold.

"Poor little lad," said his old nurse, "we'll not wash thee to-night. He be tired, sure-ly. But thee mun say thee prayers, Tommy."

"Say 'em twice to-morrow morning too," said Tommy, yawning. "*So* sleepy."

"Nay, sonny, thee mun say 'em to-night, an' ask God to bless an' presarve thee."

So Tommy went shivering down on his knees, and said, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and the Lord's Prayer.

"That's a good lad, Tommy," said Mrs. Hogget. "Thee mun never forget to say th' prayers, night an' marnin'. It canna' do thee any harm, and maybe it 'll do thee a sight o' good." With which profound

observation she tucked him in, kissed him, and crept out of the room.

In less than thirty seconds Tommy was sound asleep. After a time, his dinner not having properly digested, he began to dream. He dreamt that he and Ben had gone to the tower of the old church to rob the rooks' nests. As he lay panting and kicking on his back in bed, he thought they were going up, up, up the narrow stone staircase of the ruinous old tower. Surely there never were such a lot of steps, thought Tommy. Then he would pant and struggle again in his sleep. At last he thought they had got to the top, and he was taking one of the nests from Ben, when all the rooks flew out and around him, cawing at him, "Fire, fire, fire—thieves, thieves! Who stole the rooks' nest!" Then several of them flew up the steeple, and laying hold of the hammer of the bell, rang out "Clang! clang! clang!" and Tommy, with the perspiration running down over him, vowing in his sleep he would never rob another rook's nest, awoke with a gurgle and a cry.

At first he could not persuade himself he had been dreaming. The bell was ringing loud enough now, though he neither heard nor saw the rooks. So he rubbed his eyes and sat up in bed. There was the bell again, "Clang! clang!" and he heard the shouts of men, and the hurrying of feet. He began to feel frightened, and dug his knuckles in his eyes preparatory to setting up a good roar. And still the bell rang out "Clang! clang!" and the voices shouted and cursed, and the feet hurried to and fro. "What *can* be the matter?" Tommy whimpered. Then he

suddenly thought of what old mother Hogget had been telling him one night by the kitchen fire: "That the Last Day would probably soon come, when the dead should rise from their graves, and the poor stand equal with the rich, and all should appear before the great JUDGE," and his hair began to stand upright, and great beads of sweat to pour down his poor little face. At last he thought that if this were the case he should like to have his uncle to take care of him; and, shivering and shaking, he scrambled out of bed, and drew back the curtains from the window. Now Tommy's room looked right out over the rick-yard, and when he saw the long tongues of flame leaping demon-like straight up into the air, and the half-dressed men moving about with long forks in their hands, and with the glare of the fire on their faces, sure enough, he thought, the world is come to an end, and is being burnt up. So he rushed out of the room on to the landing, crying out in the greatest distress and fear, "Uncle! uncle, where are you, uncle?" But seeing no one, he crept down the old oak staircase, crying, "Uncle! Ben! come to Tommy."

He got as far as the hall, however, without anyone hearing his cries, and just as he thought that everyone had left him to be burnt up alone, and he had sat himself down on the cold floor with nothing but his nightdress on, which every icy gust that blew in through the open door lifted from off his shivering little body, a tall, dark, swarthy man, with earrings in his ears, and eyes that gleamed like sparks of fire, sprang from the far end of the hall, wrapped a rug round him, and lifting him in his arms crept

noiselessly back into the shadow, and on through a room at the back of the house, which had at one time been the library, but which now contained more samples of wheat and barley than books. He then opened the window, and still carrying Tommy in his arms, dropped himself lightly into a court beneath, from whence he rapidly made his way out into the fields. After travelling at a rapid pace for some time, he stopped to take breath, saying to himself, "A thousand devils! but the kinchin is heavy."

Now Tommy had been wondering all this time where he was being taken. He had no doubt but that old mother Hoggett's prophecy had come true. So when he heard his bearer say, "A thousand devils!" he began to cry and kick. "Oh, please," cried Tommy, "if this is the Last Day, don't carry me *there*," meaning the place he had been told naughty boys were sent to. "Indeed I'll be a good boy."

"Devils!" said the fellow, laughing to himself at Tommy's struggles and prayers. "What does the kinchin think?" Then drawing the rug from off the child's face, he said, "Look here, you Satan's spawn, you see the cold river running there? Well, if you make another sound or move but a limb it will be *your* last day. I'll pitch you in, like a puppy dog."

Tommy looked at the river, and then at the man's face, and he firmly believed that on the slightest provocation he would be hurled into the dark stream and never rise again. So he lay quiet and still, all but the heaving of his chest with his sobs. Then

he was carried on swiftly for a considerable time. At length, his bearer took the rug from off him and set him down, and he saw the day was breaking, and they were in a neighbourhood he had never seen before. They had left the green fat pastures, such as were common about Orleton Manor, and had entered on a bleak hilly district, where not a house or cottage was to be seen. A wide moor stretched away on one side, while on the other the ridge of a range of bare, rugged hills formed the sky line.

"Now then," said the man, when he had set his burden down, "mind what I'm about to tell you. I'm going to take you to some friends of yours who are very anxious to see you. So very anxious, indeed, are they, that they have been watching for an opportunity to speak to you for a very long time. It is very probable, though, that you mayn't desire to see them."

"Is it uncle, please?" asked Tommy, beginning to cry again.

"No, it isn't your uncle," replied the man; "it's your aunt."

"But I haven't got any aunt," said Tommy.

"Oh, you have, though; and she means to see you. Your wicked uncle won't let her if he can help it. So mind what I say. If you speak to any living soul we may chance to meet, you had better look out."

"But I don't want to see my aunt, if I have one," pleaded Tommy. "Please, sir, take me to my uncle."

"You see that?" said the man, showing him a clasp knife, with which he had begun to cut some bread and cheese. "Do you know what that's for?"

"Yes, sir," Tommy replied; "to eat your breakfast with."

"No, it isn't! that's to cut little boys' heads off who won't do as their friends bid them, and keep quiet. So stow your gab."

The man went on eating his breakfast, and Tommy, who was becoming hungry, sat watching him. He began to wish he had had another helping of beef the night before, or that his companion would offer to share his breakfast with him. Every time the man looked up from his occupation, he caught Tommy's eyes fixed on him.

"You are very rude," said the man at last. "What do you stare like that for? Where are your manners, you little devil?"

"I won't do so no more," said Tommy, looking away.

Tommy's promise not to do so any more was like a good many other promises made in this world—no sooner made than broken. He knew it was not becoming to watch every piece of bread the man put into his mouth, and he tried very hard for three minutes not to look; but it was of no use. His eyes *would* return to the point of fascination. Some modesty, however, he did show, for as often as the man looked up, Tommy dropped his eyes, or looked another way.

At last, whether the man had grown tired of having two great grey eyes fixed on him—and it was probably the case, for it is unpleasant to be stared at when one is eating—or whether Tommy's gaze lingered more longingly than before on the provisions, he stopped in the act of placing three cubic

inches of bread into his mouth, and after staring Tommy completely out of countenance, said, "I'll be hanged if I don't think the young beggar wants some!"

"If you please, sir," Tommy replied.

"Why, what a little glutton you are," said the man. "Blame me if I ever see such a greedy little beast."

"But I'm very hungry," pleaded Tommy.

"Hungry! how can you be hungry, when you had three helps of that splendid beef only last night?"

"Only two, sir; indeed, it was only two," said Tommy.

"I say 'twas three," replied the man. "I see you while I was watching through the winder. S'help me! you eat enough to last an or'nary boy of your size for a fortnight. You'll ruin the whole tribe if you eat like that. There won't be enough hares in the country to satisfy you, and where the fowls are to come from, if you set such an example to the other kinchins, hang me if I know."

"Indeed, sir," whimpered Tommy, "'twas only two."

"'Twas three, I tell you," said the man. "If you say it wasn't, I'll wallop you."

"Two, sir! two beefs—"

"Then I must wallop you!" said the man, grasping a stick, and going towards him.

"An' a pudding!" roared Tommy. "Two beefs and a pudding, sir, that was all."

"Oh, an' a pudden," said the man, reseating him-

self. "Well, isn't that three helps? Why 'tis more than three helps! pudden is so very filling."

"But that was last night, sir, and this is to-morrow morning," said Tommy, crying.

"And what o' that" replied his companion. "Must little boys be always a-stuffing theirselves? You'll kill yourself some of these days, an' then you'll be wanting the doctor."

Here, however, he found he had consumed all his cheese, and had still a crust of bread left. So he looked from the crust to Tommy, and then back again at the crust, as if debating in his mind whether he should eat it without cheese or give it to the child. The crust looked hard, and Tommy looked hungry, but which of the two had the effect of causing him to shut his knife and put it in his pocket, the present chronicler has been unable to discover. He did, however, pocket his knife, and throwing the crust to Tommy, said "There, you greedy, never-satisfied little varmint. There's a beautiful piece of bread for you, an' I hope you'll take care not to eat it too quick, or, dash it, you'll bust."

He then took a short black pipe from his pocket, and after filling it with very bad and unwholesome tobacco, he struck a light and began to smoke in silence. Presently he took the pipe from his mouth, and turning to Tommy, said, "You don't smoke, I hope, do you?"

"No, sir." Tommy replied, munching away at his crust, which was as hard as a navy biscuit. "Uncle smokes, but I'm too small yet."

"Oh, you're too small, are you?" said the man.

"Well, I'm glad o' that, or blow me if you wouldn't be crying for my 'bacca."

He then continued to smoke on in silence until his pipe was out, when he knocked out the ashes, and produced a tobacco pouch made of the skin of a squirrel with the mask on, which Tommy immediately recognised as one belonging to his uncle. He smoothed the skin, admired the squirrel's head, opened the pouch, looked into it, and then felt the inside with his fingers.

"He's very pretty," he said, "but very empty. There's nothing inside him but ingy-rubber. That's a pity, for all my 'bacca is gone. I say," he continued, turning to Tommy, and holding up the pouch, "do you know whose this is?"

"Uncle's, sir," Tommy replied.

"And whose is this?" he continued, holding up a well-smoked meerschaum pipe.

"Uncle's, sir," Tommy said again.

"An' whose are these 'ere?" he continued, producing half-a-dozen silver spoons.

"I—I think they're uncle's too, sir," said Tommy.

"Well, they was," said the man, putting them back in his pocket. "They was once, but your uncle's uncommon fond o' me, and give them me for a keepsake. An' he told me not to say nothing about 'em to anyone else, or he'd take it very unkind o' me. So mind you know nothing about them when we come to your aunt's, or you know what I said about my big knife."

Tommy promised he would say nothing about them to anyone. He wondered very much, though,

at his uncle giving them to his companion, as he had not only never seen him at Orleton Manor, but he had never known his uncle give anything to any living being but his mother and himself, with the exception of extra cider to the men for extra work.

After having obtained this promise from Tommy, he rose from where he had been lying and said, "What a time you do take at your meals! you was two good hours a-stuffing last night, and then first thing this morning you must keep me here awaiting ever so long. *Have* you done, or would you like another hour? You little varmints have got tremendous big bellies, I'm thinking."

Tommy assured him he had quite finished.

"I'm precious glad of it," said the man. "Now, march!"

They now left the level country and struck away over the hills, following the sheep tracks. Tommy felt this terrible hard work, for he had to walk now, as his companion assured him that he would be so uncommon heavy after having eaten such a breakfast, that he'd be hanged if he'd carry him a yard. After a great deal of labour, and many forcible, if not gentle admonitions from his companion who dragged him along by the hand, they reached the summit, and began to descend the other side. This was much easier work than climbing up, and they proceeded at a much greater rate than before. Tommy was becoming very tired, though, and begged to be allowed to rest.

"What an ungrateful little devil you are," said the man. "Here have I been watching over you

all night, to say nothing of one or two other small jobs, and carrying you, and giving you all my breakfast, and you go to get tired. However, if you can't go any further, I must carry you again, I s'pose; so jump up."

Tommy was glad enough to get on his companion's back. Indeed he was so tired that had it not been for fear of tumbling off, he would have fallen asleep. In this manner, then, they descended into the valley, and after travelling along a bridle path for a few miles, during which time the man repeatedly assured Tommy with many wishes that he might be cursed and hanged, that he would never again feed a boy whom he had to carry, they got so precious heavy. At length they came to four cross-roads, and at the juncture of these roads there was a small dilapidated-looking inn, over the door of which hung a sign, which weather and long service had considerably damaged, and on the sign was painted in black letters "The Fiddler's Rest."

At the door of the "Fiddler's Rest" they were met by the landlord, a dark, ill-favoured looking man, who took Tommy roughly from his companion's shoulders, and said: "Well, Gabriel, you've got the kinchin, I see, and precious cold he looks too."

"Cold, you rough devil! and no wonder," remarked a slatternly, slipshod woman, who was standing in the passage behind her husband, the landlord. "Don't ye see the kid has nothing on but his night-dress? See how his feet are bleeding, too!"

"Hold your infernal jaw," remarked her spouse,

casting an angry glance at her. "If you open your trap too wide, I'll stop it some day for ever."

"You stop it, ye scum!" shouted the amazon. "I dar ye! Yer a bully, an' yer a coward, and never yet dar face a woman with any pluck, much less a man."

"I'll face you, directly!" said the husband.

"An' I dare ye!" replied the wife, putting her arms akimbo.

During this conjugal scene, the man who had brought Tommy to the "Fiddler's Rest," laughed immoderately, as if enjoying one of the most mirthful scenes in the world. At last he said: "Indeed, Peggy, everybody knows you are the best man. An' the kinchin *is* cold, an' very likely tired; so if you will take him into the house an' let him lie down, it'll not be the worse for you."

So Tommy was marched into a small dark room, and placed on an old sofa. The woman then threw a shawl over him, and he immediately fell asleep, the last sounds he heard being the mutterings of the woman vowing that before very long she would have the liver of some person to Tommy unknown.

"And now," said the landlord to Tommy's companion, whom we shall call by his name of Gabriel, "have you done the other job?"

Gabriel nodded.

The landlord then went softly into the house, and opened the door of the room in which Tommy had been taken. Finding that no one was listening, he returned to Gabriel, and said: "What is to be done with the kinchin? Are you going to—?" He finished the sentence by drawing his hand across his throat.

"No! no! I'll have no blood on my hands. Them as wants it, may do it themselves. You bring me some spirits, and I'll lie down for an hour."

CHAPTER VI.

While Tommy slept on the old sofa in the little, dark room of the inn, and Gabriel, after having finished his gin-and-water, lay stretched at full length in front of the kitchen fire, a traveller was approaching the "Fiddler's Rest" from the opposite direction to that by which Tommy and his companion had come. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man of about five-and-thirty years of age. His carriage was upright and soldierly, and his bronzed face close shaven all but the upper lip, which was shaded by a dark, heavy moustache, would have been quite sufficient reason for anyone to have hazarded an opinion that he belonged to the military profession. As to his rank, an opinion could not be so easily formed, for while there was something in his appearance which bespoke the gentleman, his clothes were of the coarsest texture, although the cut of them was sufficiently good to show off his muscular figure to advantage. There was a resolution about the mouth and a firmness in the tread, as he swung along with his head in the air, at an honest four-mile-an-hour walk. Presently he stopped, and giving way to a habit he occasionally indulged in, of thinking aloud, remarked, "If my memory serves me right there should be an

alehouse not far off, and unless it has improved since I was by this way last, it must have an indifferent character. What a lot of vagabonds used to meet there at the wakes! and indeed, master Bob, you're not much better than a vagabond yourself. Why, the last time you ever entered the inn you half killed a man. But that was a good action of yours, Bob," he continued, while a good-natured smile overspread his face. "The fellow was a bully and deserved it; and if you have nothing worse to reproach yourself with than that, you've been sadly maligned."

He then began to whistle softly a plaintive air, and if one might judge from the expression of his face, old memories were crowding back on him. "Yes," he said, "that was the song *she* liked to hear me sing; but what an age since then! There are few things I've not tried, and few countries I've not seen in those twelve years; and during the whole time I've not sung that song since I sang it to her. She was not the only one who loved to hear me sing that song, as I *used* to sing it. I wonder whether I've forgotten it! I've a good mind to try. These old memories are rushing back like ghosts of the joys and hopes I thought I had buried. Let me see if I can exorcise them."

Then, leaning over a gate that opened into a field by the roadside, he sang in a voice of singular power and sweetness:

"'Tis I, my love! the moonbeams play
On rock, and tree, and ev'ry leaf,—
Night pales before the dawn of day,
And warns me that the hours are brief;

E'er fiercer rays o'er earth shall hover—
Then come, sweet love! 'tis I, thy lover.

"The ruddy face of morn will rise
Far in the east, and other lights
Shall shine from out the cloudless skies,
Denying love, love's sweetest rites,
And dying night no more shall cover
Beneath it's sable folds, thy lover."

"I'm afraid I've forgotten the rest," he said, after he had sung these two verses. "But it's time to step out again. I feel as though I should like a little refreshment after my twenty-mile walk. Ah! there is the inn, and there is the footpath I came over when *her* father turned me out of his house; and there is the very spot I horsewhipped that villain Parkes. That rascal has a deal to answer for. Who knows! had it not been for him I might have been a steady church-going man, with a wife and half a dozen children. Gad, though, Bob!" he continued, laughing very heartily, "that may be a matter for congratulation to all concerned. My experience of you these last twelve years does not much favour the idea of your domesticity."

He then stepped out at a good even pace, whistling as he went, until he came to the "Fiddler's Rest," a house of entertainment with which he had been somewhat familiar in his time. So he at once entered the only room of which the inn boasted with the exception of the kitchen, and, after seating himself, summoned the landlady and ordered some ale.

"I doubt you will find it cold here, sir," she remarked. "The fire has not burned up. Would you please walk into the kitchen? There are some

blazing logs on the hearth there, and you can sit and warm yourself while you drink your ale."

"Never mind the fire, mistress," replied the traveller. "I can't stop long, for I've some distance to go yet. This is very mild ale. How many bushels of malt do you put to the hogshead?"

"Twelve, sir; every grain of it," she replied, standing between her customer and the old sofa on which Tommy was sleeping.

"Indeed. I should have thought six would have made it stronger. However, the days are short, and the miles hereabouts are long, so here's your reckoning, mistress."

Having paid for his refreshment, the traveller bid the landlady a good evening, and resumed his journey. Instead, however, of proceeding on the road by which Gabriel and Tommy had come, he took the road at right angles to it, and, as it was connected with some bygone experience of his, he forgot altogether about the shortness of the days, proceeding leisurely, if not slowly, and occasionally stopping to recall the memory of some incident connected with a field, a particular bend of the road, or a tree. *That* was the bank from which he had first taken *her* in his arms. There were ferns growing there now as then, when *she* had gathered them and he had lifted her to the ground. *There* was the hog-backed stile which he had cleared on one of her father's horses and pounded the field, and so on.

Now while he had been creeping along the road at this, for him, most unusual pace, Gabriel had risen from before the kitchen fire, and set out on

his journey with Tommy. It also happened that his road was the same the traveller had proceeded on, so it was not surprising that as Gabriel hurried over the ground as fast as he could persuade Tommy to travel, and the other traveller had proceeded as slowly as was possible without actually standing still, it was not long before Mr. Bob found himself followed. It happened that as he was standing still and indulging in the train of thought already described, he heard a man's voice angrily expostulating. This voice belonged to Gabriel, who was endeavouring by threats and vows of what he would do, to make Tommy walk faster.

"May the devil take the kinchin!" he said. "A snail would creep faster. Why don't you come along, you young varmint?"

"I can't; indeed, I can't!" Tommy sobbed, while the tears ran down his face. "The stones hurt my feet so much, and I'm so very cold."

"Walk faster, then," said Gabriel. "I'm cold enough, too. I'll freeze if we don't get on quicker than this."

"I can't go no further, sir," wept Tommy. "Please let me die and go to mamma."

"Let yer die! you young imp! this is the gratitude you show me for carrying you. What'll yer aunt say if I go home without you? Get up, I say!"

"Indeed, sir, I can't," replied Tommy, faintly.

"Then I'll wollop yer," said Gabriel, and immediately he gave poor Tommy a hearty cut with a switch which made the lad give a piteous cry.

Now this occurred almost close to where Bob, as

he called himself, was standing. It also happened that that gentlemanly vagabond had a most chivalrous nature, and the cry of a woman or a child would go to his heart like a knife. Immediately therefore, and as a matter of course, for the thought of minding his own business and leaving others to mind theirs never once entered his mind, he took three mighty steps, and before he had time to repeat the blow, Gabriel felt a large hand that seemed all knuckles, and every knuckle an iron knob, inserted between his neck and the bird's-eye wisp that encircled it, and the next instant saw a dark handsome face flushed with righteous anger, and a pair of bold fierce eyes fixed on him, and heard a stern voice say, "You infernal coward! What do you mean by striking the child?"

Now Gabriel was not a coward by any means. Everyone who had the honour of an intimate acquaintance with that gentleman acknowledged he was a well plucked one. Moreover, he had the reputation of being a bruiser of no mean skill, having fought in one or two prize engagements of minor importance. So he looked at the person who had so roughly interrupted him in his essay on obedience, as if to measure his power, and said, "Hands off, master! Talk if you will, for hard words break no bones."

"Hands off, you scoundrel!" replied Tommy's new friend. "By Heaven! I've a mind to wring your neck, and save the hangman a job! Whose child is that, and where are you taking him?"

"Again, I say, hands off, master, or maybe it will be worse for you," said Gabriel.

"Worse for me, will it?" replied Tommy's friend with scorn. "I don't know why I stand chaffering with such a hang-dog rascal as you. But do you know the Gipsy Pet?"

"He is my brother," said Gabriel.

"Very well, then! I am the man who thrashed your brother on Newmarket Heath, and I fancy he can thrash you. Here, my little fellow," he continued, turning to Tommy, who was lying on the ground in a state of semi-exhaustion, "Whose lad are you? Do you know where you are going?"

"I'm uncle's nephew," murmured Tommy. "Uncle John ——"

Before Tommy could finish what he was about to say, Gabriel gave a sudden turn, and freeing himself from his opponent's grasp, aimed a blow at his temple, saying with an oath, "You will have it, then! Take that, and learn not to meddle."

Gabriel would have told you in his moments of confidence, that in his time he had stood up before some good men; but it is to be doubted whether that gentleman had ever before met the equal of the man he was now engaged with. His blow was guarded with all the ease of the most practised skill, and before he had time to repeat it, he was astonished, dazed, and half killed by such a shower of blows planted with the most consummate art and terrible force, as he had never thought man capable of. Reeling, bleeding, sobbing for the breath that had been knocked out of him, he thought it was all over with him. There was no stopping for time on the part of his antagonist, no falling off in the force of those frightful blows, no softening of that terrible

face. "It's all over," thought Gabriel. "He means to kill me. I wish the devil had the kinchin and all the gipsy queans this side of hell."

When he muttered this amiable wish he was utterly unable to return a blow, so his astonishment was great when he saw his terrible antagonist suddenly come to the ground as if all life had left his body. As soon as he could recover his confused faculties, however, the cause was apparent. The landlord of the "Fiddler's Rest" was busily engaged in hitting the fallen man over the head with a stick.

"There, Gabriel, my boy; see what it is to have a friend like me. He'd have killed you in a minute more if I hadn't been too much for him. There, my fine meddler, there's another crack that'll keep you quiet for some time I reckon."

"Let him be," growled Gabriel.

"Well, now, if you're not ungrateful, Gabriel!" said the landlord. "Here have I been and thrashed the man as thrashed you, and you tell me to let him be."

"You thrash him!" Gabriel replied, scowling as well as his damaged features would admit of. "That he beat me, I don't deny, but I fought him fair. You struck him from behind with a bludgeon, like a coward as you are. Why, he'd beat the champion if he was to try; and as to you, the glance of his eye would blast you."

"It's no use argyfying," said the fellow, crestfallen. "I've saved your bacon, that's certain, and you had better pad the hoof, or maybe you'll feel the darbies on your wrists. There's them you wouldn't like to meet on the look-out for you."

"Where's the kinchin?" growled Gabriel.

"He's lying close by you, but whether he's dead or faint, blame me if I know or care. There are them as wouldn't grieve if he was never to come to again, and maybe you'd be quite as welcome to them as we knows on, if you was to put him to lie on his face in the ditch, and make a job for the crowner."

"That's always the way with you infernal cowards," said Gabriel with an oath; "you always recommend murder."

"Hush," said the landlord, with a scared look on his face, "do you know what yer a saying?"

"I'll not hush," replied Gabriel. "'Tis murder you mean, an' if you advise it, curse yer, why don't you do it."

"No! no!" said the ruffian, "I didn't mean *that*, Gabriel. You always was a hot-tempered un. But you had better start. You must carry the kid unless you ——. Well, never mind, its your business, not mine, as I knows on. I'll just see if this cove has anything in his pockets, and then fix him against the fence."

Now it so happened that a private coursing party had been having some sport on the estate of Lord Whitchurch, some few miles from the "Fiddler's Rest," and Mr. Arthur Kelmarsh was returning home in his dog-cart, soon after the landlord had emptied the fallen man's pockets. Mr. Kelmarsh was in good humour with himself, with his groom who sat by his side, and his black bitch which had won her courses. So when he saw the figure of a man lying in the road, he pulled up, and said, "By Jove, it's a deuced cold night for any fellow to lie there. Just get

down, James, and rouse him. He's been drinking too freely, I expect."

The groom got down out of the cart, and examined the figure, but immediately started back frightened, for indeed, the fallen man looked horrible enough. The blood from the wounds on his head had run down over his face, and had congealed in his moustache, so that he presented a sufficiently frightful spectacle.

"Good God, sir, the man's been murdered!" said James to his master.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Kelmarsh, "murdered! Here, hold the mare."

He immediately got down and examined the prostrate hero, and opening his vest and shirt, placed his hand over his heart, which was beginning to beat again.

"He'll be all right directly," said Mr. Kelmarsh. "Leave the mare—she'll stand—and fetch me some water from the ditch."

The groom brought his master some water in his hat, which they poured over his face. Mr. Kelmarsh then produced a small flask of brandy, and placing it to the man's mouth, poured a little down his throat. He at once began to revive.

"That's the ticket," said Mr. Kelmarsh. "A little more of that stuff, and we shall have him all right."

Again they poured a small quantity down his throat. The effect now was greater. He opened his eyes, seemed dazed for a moment, and then said, "'Twas a foul blow. The blackguard, whoever he was, dared not stand in front of me. I would have thrashed them both."

"Fistycuffs," said Mr. Kelmarsh, with a wink to his servant. Then addressing his patient, he said, "You'll do that yet, never fear. Do you think you can stand? They seem to have dropped it on to you pretty heavy."

"If you'll favour me with another pull at your flask, sir, I think I shall be all right. They struck me pretty freely about the head, I think, and unless my hands deceive me, they've helped themselves to the small quantity of coin I had about me."

"Turned his pockets regular inside out," observed the groom.

"Never mind that! A fellow of your inches can soon fill them again," said the master. "Here, take my arm, and I'll help you up. There, that's it! You won't know there's been anything the matter with you in an hour's time. How far are you going?"

"I'm on my way to Stowe, but I shall not be able to reach it to-night."

"I should think not, indeed," said Mr. Kelmarsh, "Here, let me rub some of this blood off your face. James, bring me one of the lamps."

The groom brought the lamp, and held it while Mr. Kelmarsh endeavoured to cleanse the face of the wounded man. While he was thus employed in playing the good Samaritan, he began to think he had seen that face somewhere before. At last he said, "I've a recollection of your face, I think. Where have I ever seen you before?"

"At your father's house, sir," replied the man. "I was engaged to your sister."

"By Jove!" said Mr. Kelmarsh, with sudden animation, "that's true. You are Bob Eversley, and

infernally bad they treated you. Alter the cart, James. This gentleman will go home with us."

The groom altered the seat in the dog-cart and got up behind. "Now then, Eversley, get in," said Mr. Kelmarsh, "and not another word until we have you made comfortable, and have doctored your head."

They drove away at a rapid pace for about four miles, and after passing through the lodge gates of Mr. Kelmarsh's carriage drive and up a short avenue, they arrived at Middlehurst. Eversley was at once taken upstairs to a dressing-room, had a bath, and the wounds on his head, which, fortunately were not serious, attended to, and clothed in an evening suit belonging to his host. He then descended to the drawing-room, quite a different man in appearance to what we had seen him at the "Fiddler's Rest." This alteration was not confined to his dress by any means. His manner was quite different to the free, happy-go-lucky appearance he presented some few hours before. Instead of being firm and bold, he was now evidently nervous and excited. He even cast a momentary glance at the hall door, doubting whether he had not better run away. But summoning all his courage at the door of the drawing-room he said to himself, "Now Bob, you've gone through worse than this; you've faced the enemy and been under fire more than once without flinching, so don't make an ass of yourself all because you *may* meet a woman. Besides you may as well do it now as at any other time, and it will be nothing when you have taken the plunge. So courage, Bob."

Having fortified himself with these thoughts he turned the handle of the drawing-room door and

entered. I cannot see why he should have turned so deadly pale and have hung his head when he entered, for all his life, as Mr. Kelmarsh said, he had been more sinned against than sinning. Moreover, there were only his host and two ladies in the room, and as he was a decidedly handsome fellow, the ladies ought to be more afraid of him than he of them. But nevertheless, he did turn pale, and tremble. One of the ladies was *her* of whom he had been thinking. Perhaps that was the reason, for Samson, we all know, was the veriest muff in the presence of Delilah.

"Ah! Bob, we were afraid you had run away again," said Mr. Kelmarsh, advancing to meet him. "You've taken such a time to dress. But then we must give you a little law, I suppose, as you have had to dress your head. Never mind, *you* needn't laugh! I always laugh at my own jokes. And now, my dear Eversley, allow me to welcome you to Middlehurst, though you don't owe this house much good will."

Mr. Bob could only bow. There was something sticking in his throat which prevented his speaking.

"Now then," continued Mr. Kelmarsh, "let me introduce you to my wife. I don't think she has had the pleasure of seeing you before, though she has heard a good deal of you. Mary, this is our old friend, Mr. Eversley."

Mrs. Kelmarsh was a sprightly little woman of about eight-and-twenty, with not much pretensions to beauty, but with a decidedly happy-looking face. She advanced to Bob at once, and held out her hand to him, saying, "Mr. Eversley is no stranger. I have

heard so much about him that I feel like an old acquaintance. We have heard of your doings out *there*," meaning probably some part of the world in which Bob had served, "and of your saving the colours of your regiment, Mr. Eversley, and I am exceedingly glad to see you."

Now that Bob was actually facing what he had feared, his courage came back to him, and with his courage, his voice. So, with a smile playing about his firm mouth which had so lately shown signs of trepidation, and which made his handsome face look even handsomer, he replied, "The pleasure is mine; and the more so, as it was unexpected. The small affair of our regimental colours was nothing. I have faced a more difficult task at a comparatively recent date."

During this conversation the other occupant of the room had remained standing, with one hand holding on to the marble mantel-piece. Her face was partly turned from them, but what was to be seen was extremely beautiful. She was much taller than the mistress of the house, and her figure was of the most perfect symmetry. Her auburn hair was smoothed back over her low white brow, and gathered in bands at the back of her small, well-shaped head. Her eyes were of a liquid grey, and her features, which were of the Grecian type, were ashy pale. Her age might have been anything from five-and-twenty to thirty years. She turned towards him when Bob advaced to her, and just looked at him once, but that one look opened afresh wounds which years had seared over, and which Bob had fondly hoped would never open again; and in his

heart that minute he wished he had been lying where his host had found him—cold, stiff, and dead.

"Has Miss Kelmarsh no welcome for an old reprobate?" asked Bob, gaily.

"I—I am glad to see you, Mr. Eversley," she said, in a voice scarcely audible. "What have you been doing so long?"

"I have been wandering about the world, and going up and down in it," he replied, smiling. A sickly smile, I grant you; but he tried to be gay, and showed his pluck in trying.

"A purposeless life, Bob," she said, almost tenderly.

"Not so, I assure you. A vagabond life, if you like. But with a purpose, Jane. I've been trying to forget."

"And could you?" she asked, quietly, while her beautiful eyes filled with tears as they again turned their soft glance on him.

"No! God help me!" he answered with a groan. "Never."

She had loved him for years. She had loved him when he was a gay, handsome lad, accomplished and hopeful. In those days he had confided to her willing ear high hopes, never, alas, to be realised. She had seen him courted by the young and petted by the old. She had loved him while the bloom was yet on his cheek, before a hard world had hardened and battered him. She had seen him when the finger of scorn and suspicion pointed to him as one lost to all honour. She had seen him go out from under that very roof with her

father's stern dismissal, and she had loved him through it all. But never had she loved him as at this moment, when the houseless, homeless, friendless vagabond stood before her, his head bent, his handsome face pale with anguish, and his seared and bleeding heart full of agony at the thought of that happiness which should have been his, but which fate had denied him.

"Dinner is sarved," said the old butler, in his provincial dialect.

"Now then, Eversley, if you've done talking with my sister, will you offer Mrs. Kelmarsh your arm? You and Jane can finish whatever you have to say some other time, and after dinner, old boy, you shall tell us what you've been doing these last dozen years."

So Bob took Mrs. Kelmarsh in to dinner, gaily discussing as he went the last novel and the opera, with all the breeding of a man who had never spent a day out of polite society.

Oh, Bob! what a humbug you were! As though *they* didn't know you were hiding *your fox* beneath your mantle, and that it was eating your heart out!

CHAPTER VII.

"EVERSLEY, my dear fellow," said Mr. Kelmarsh, as they sat over their wine after dinner, "you have much to forgive this house. My father was convinced of it long enough before he died, and would have made every amend possible, could he have discovered where you were. We advertised for you in the 'agony column' of the *Times* and other papers. But you had so carefully destroyed all traces of your whereabouts that every attempt we made ended in failure."

"You must remember I was very young, and the charge made against me was of the most damaging character," replied Eversley. "The merest suspicion of such a thing was ruin to one destined for commercial pursuits."

"True! but no one here believed in it for a moment. I do not think my father placed much credence in it, and on investigation it proved to be as absurd as wicked."

"Excuse me," said Eversley; "but if your father did not believe I had falsified the books in my charge, why did he forbid me his house, especially as I should soon have been a partner in the firm, and—and have been connected with him in another way?"

"There I think *you* were somewhat to blame, Bob," replied Mr. Kelmarsh; "you not only denied the charge with great anger, but you first half killed his confidential clerk, Parkes, who, I grant you, it is more than probable was a great rascal, and you upbraided my father in no measured terms, and accused him of injustice, and of a desire to make an excuse for breaking off his engagements with you."

"I cannot see there was anything wrong in that," said Mrs. Kelmarsh. "Is a man to sit quietly under the most unjust accusations, and say nothing?"

"Certainly not," replied her husband, laughing. "You may depend, Bob did not. He proved his cause on the body of his enemy."

"And served him right!" said Mrs. Kelmarsh.

"I grant you that too," replied her husband. "But was it politic? Had he waited but a very short time for an investigation of the charge, his innocence would have been made clear enough. But instead of that, he flies out on everyone, quarrels with my father, and goes away, leaving his name at the mercy of every scandal-monger, for a time at least. You were wrong there, Bob, you must confess."

"I have been wrong in many things, both before and since that time," said Eversley. "But regrets are useless, and recriminations are worse than useless. The last twelve years are gone, and there's an end of them."

"May they not be retrieved?" asked Miss Jane, while a slight blush just coloured her cheeks for one instant.

"Of course they can!" said Mrs. Kelmarsh. "Why, Mr. Eversley has all the world before him."

"Scarcely at my age, I think," Bob remarked, smiling.

"At your age! and why not?" inquired his hostess. "You are barely five-and-thirty, and that in a man is but the commencement of his prime."

"I have lived a hundred years since I was here last," said Eversley. "That makes it rather late in the day for me to enter the vineyard, does it not? and yet I've been thinking of trying again. I was on my way to Stowe, to see my sister, who, you know, is married to the Rector."

Everyone applauded this resolution—a resolution, by the way, which he had come to within the last two hours. For years he had lived an adventurous life—a sort of soldier of fortune—owning no ties, having no hopes but the hope of escaping from life without illness—a vagabond life, and a sudden death; and if the end came in battle, so much the better. But suddenly a pair of grey eyes look on him, and the education of years, acquired in the hardest of schools, is undone.

"You must allow me to help you to start again, Eversley," said Mr. Kelmarsh. "We owe you that at least." And Miss Jane smiled approval on her brother.

"Thank you, no! I shall begin alone, and if I fail—well—I shall be no worse off than now."

"At any rate," said Mr. Kelmarsh, "we can leave that an open question. Now then, tell us what you have been doing for so many years."

"When I left this house," Eversley replied, "I proceeded to London. I think everyone goes to London when they are in trouble, for I certainly met a great number there who were out at elbows, or otherwise under the weather. I drew my money out of the firm, amounting, I think, to about five thousand pounds. Now a man can go to the bad easily enough who hasn't a penny, but the way there is much easier if he has a few thousands. I remained in town for a month or so only, but that time, short as it was, was sufficient to lessen my capital by one half. I then visited Paris, and afterwards made a tour of the principal gambling Spas on the Continent. Was I ever fortunate? Yes, sometimes. Once I had a run of luck for several nights, winning half-a-million francs. Then I was the king of the place. Princes asked me to dinner, and Duchesses smiled on me. The oldest gamblers backed my luck, and swore by me until the wheel of fortune turned. I then lost more rapidly than I had won before. The end of it was, I left Homburg with about two hundred francs in my pocket, after having paid my hotel bills. During the next two or three years I lived under an assumed name, in various ways. I rode steeplechases for the foreigners, and acted as courier to tourists; and believe me, the latter profession is not at all an unpleasant one. In that capacity I visited most of the cities of the Continent, and all the chief points of interest, whether for scenery or art. It is a cheap way of doing the grand tour, Kelmarsh, and the Brotherhood of the Bag are extremely pleasant fellows—much addicted to lying and boasting—but withal good comrades.

"I gave up this life at Madrid, having excited the interest of a romantic and elderly lady, in whose service I then was. The woman, I fear, was a fool; so I left her at her hotel one day, and set out to join the army of Don Carlos. I entered as a volunteer, and after some considerable service, rose to the rank of Brigadier. But resenting an insult offered by one of the Prince's staff to a woman, the fellow paraded me, and I left him on the ground with a bullet through his lung, and then made my way into France again. While living at a small cabaret in one of the southern ports, I became acquainted with some gentlemen of free-trade principles, and as my purse was almost empty, it was no difficult task to persuade me to join them. It was a wild life and suited my temperament. I longed for excitement, and got it in plenty. I have helped to land many a cargo of contraband in Guernsey, and even on the south coast. The pitcher that goes to the well gets broken at last, though. We had determined to land a cargo of brandy not far from Plymouth. The night was dark, and we had just got the last of the kegs landed, when the Preventive men and soldiers seized the goods, and commanded us to surrender. I don't think any of the smugglers understood the command but myself. I called out that we were summoned to surrender, and the next instant a volley was poured in on us. Fortunately the night was dark, or every one of us must have fallen. When we ran to our boats, we saw a Revenue cruiser beating up towards our little craft. In fact, we were regularly trapped. All those who could jumped into the boats. Whether they escaped, or not, I do not know,

as, favoured by the darkness, I made my way inland.

"You will, perhaps, think I ought to have been satisfied by that time, and have given up searching for excitement," Eversley continued. "A wise man, I have no doubt, would have done so; but I was not a wise man. So after getting rid of my dress, which might have thrown suspicion on me, I bought some sailor's slops, and entered as a common seaman on board a brig just sailing for Van Diemen's Land. She was chartered by the government to take out convicts to the penal settlements. A greater lot of ruffians than were on board I have never seen. Indeed, I believe if everyone had their deserts, most of the sailors would have been making the voyage as convicted felons. They were picked up in the back slums of Plymouth and Devonport, just before we sailed, and a more worthless lot of rascals never trod a plank. For some time things went on pretty well, but when we had got into the tropics I saw signs among the men which I thought boded ill for the ship. There were too many indications of a good understanding between the sailors and the convicts to please me, and I reported what I saw to the Captain. Every precaution that four or five men could take against three hundred was taken. I was appointed Captain's steward, and was consequently a good deal in and out of the cabin. This was a wise precaution, as our force was too small for even one man to be separated from the others. The mutiny at length broke out. One morning, while I was removing the remains of the Captain's breakfast, I suddenly heard several shots fired in quick suc-

cession on the deck. I immediately rushed up the companion-ladder with a pistol in each hand. I believe I shot two of the villains, but I am not certain. The Captain was lying on his back, just beside the wheel, with his throat cut. The first Mate, after shooting down one of the sailors, was struck on the head and thrown overboard, and within three minutes after I had made my appearance, the second Mate and myself were thrown down the companion-ladder, and the hatches were immediately fastened on. Both of us were severely shaken and stunned by the fall, the Mate more especially so. He was knocked about the head in a frightful manner. I had also received some severe handling, but I think my head is both hard and thick. It has been pretty well tried this night."

"Indeed, that's true," said Mr. Kelmarsh, laughing. "Two or three such blows as that fellow must have given you would have caused a vacancy for a husband in this house. It is a good thing sometimes to have a thick skull."

"How can you say anything so dreadful, my dear?" said Mrs. Kelmarsh. "You should not speak so lightly. What do you think *I* should do, if anything of the kind were to happen? You may look on it as a joke; but it would be no joke for me and the children."

"Never mind, Mary! I shall not run the risk if I can help it, I assure you," replied her husband. "Now, Eversley, after this interruption has given you time to draw breath, pray continue your story."

"Let me see, where was I?" resumed Bob.

"You were lying stunned at the bottom of the companion-ladder," Miss Jane informed him.

"So I was," said Eversley. "We lay there insensible for some time, I think, for when we became conscious, we heard the most horrible uproar imaginable. After we had been thrown down the companion-ladder, the mutineers seem to have at once proceeded to break open the spirit-room, for we heard them singing horrible songs, and blaspheming, as though Pandemonium had broken loose. The brig in the meantime was left without any guidance, and drifted before the light winds which prevailed. At this time the whole of the mutineers must have been drunk; and I have no doubt, had we been able to force our way on deck, we could have retaken the ship and killed every one of the miscreants. This continued for three days. At the end of that time, the spirits having probably been all consumed, we heard them preparing to leave the ship. This was a most anxious time for us, for we heard them, as we stood on the top of the companion-ladder, discussing whether they should murder us before they left, or leave us to our fate. At length they decided to leave us where we were, and, as one ruffian observed, 'they will find it hot enough presently.'

"The meaning of this observation we presently understood. Soon after the ruffians had taken to the boats, we became aware that they had fired the ship, and a most horrible death awaited us. We tried to force the hatches which fastened us down, but it was of no use. The smoke then began to find its way into the cabin, and the atmosphere became intolerable. It was suffocating. At last the Mate

thought of the cabin windows. In a moment we had them open, and passing through them with some difficulty, we pulled ourselves up over the stern of the brig by the chains. All the fore part of the vessel was on fire. The flames ran up the tall taper masts and out on the yards, licking up everything inflammable. They leaped like fiery serpents from one point to another, from the masts to the yards and sails, and from thence to the rigging, with inconceivable fury and velocity. Fortunately for us the dingy was not taken, probably because of its small size. We immediately placed a keg of water in her, got her over the side, and pushed off. Our escape was not a minute too soon, for the fire finding its way to the magazine, in which a large quantity of gunpowder was stored, the brig blew up with a terrific explosion. Then the burning pieces of the wreck fell one by one into the sea, hissing and smoking as the waters lapped up the fire; and this was the last of the good ship *Sarah*. Of all those who left that ship alive, I have every reason to believe I am the only survivor, for not one of the boats containing the mutinous crew and convicts was ever heard of again.

"The Mate and myself were now on the open sea, without chart, compass, or provisions. The only thing we had in the boat was the keg of water. The brig had probably drifted a considerable distance while we were confined in the cabin, and we had no means of ascertaining our position. We now began to feel the intolerable pangs of hunger; this, together with the exposure, soon wasted our strength. On the seventh day the Mate died, and I was so weak I

could not throw him overboard. After his death I counted six days and nights. At the end of that time I suppose I must have become unconscious, for I knew nothing until I found myself lying in a hut, in which an old man was engaged in making damper. The boat I was in had drifted on to the shore at Cape Otway, in South Australia. I must have been at least fourteen days without food. This may appear incredible to you, but it is nevertheless true. I myself can account for thirteen days. After remaining with the old man, who was the hut-keeper on a sheep station, for some days, during which time I received much rough kindness from him, and regained my strength, I walked to Melbourne, and hearing of the richness of the gold-fields, I determined to try my luck at the diggings. My good fortune stuck to me there."

"Good fortune!" said Mr. Kelmarsh. "Why, I should have thought myself the most unfortunate of men had I gone through one half of what you describe. Tastes differ, Bob, if you call *that* being fortunate."

"Well, I think I was exceptionally fortunate throughout. I escaped being shot for smuggling at Cawsand, and am the only man who survived to tell of the loss of the *Sarah*. At the diggings I was looked on as the personification of luck. It's all *luck*, you know, with the miners. I might have had a share in any claim on the run, for wherever I struck my pick, I was almost certain to find gold.

"I soon became very rich, and might have lived in ease for the rest of my life, had I not a craving for excitement and novelty. I tired, however, of turning up nuggets of gold every time I went

into the shaft, and would almost have welcomed adversity as a change. At this time speculation in Stations was very rife. They were selling at fancy prices all over the colony. Everybody who had money was going into sheep. So I bought a Station at three pounds a head all round. Wool went down. The reaction came, and I sold at two shillings a head. I still had a small capital, but instead of going back to the diggings, I invested in town lots in Melbourne, which were to rise to a fabulous price immediately. But they didn't. The lots are there still, and are unsold. They may turn out well in time, but for the present my capital is locked up, as speculators say."

"Have you many of those town lots?" asked Mr. Kelmarsh. "Melbourne is a rapidly increasing town, and you may be a wealthy man in a few years if you hold them."

"I have about five acres in lots," replied Eversley, "and I think I shall hold them. As you say, they may turn out well some day. But to continue my story. When I had invested all my capital, I had an offer from a large sheep owner to manage a Station for him at a liberal salary; but I had had enough of sheep farming, and determined to work my way back to England. After a most tedious passage we arrived in the London Docks, and I found myself a man about town again, but with this difference, that whereas the last time I had been in London I had a considerable balance at my Banker's, I now found myself with about four pounds ten shillings. This was soon spent, and I enlisted in a cavalry regiment.

"My conduct pleasing the officers, and having been somewhat better educated than my comrades, it was not long before I was promoted to be sergeant. Here my good fortune still stuck to me. I was getting tired of the routine of a soldier's life in barracks, when a young officer who had exchanged into our regiment from the line helped me out. He had the condescension to call me a liar respecting some barrack duty, and I gave him a thrashing for which I was tried by court martial and dismissed the service. My good fortune did not leave me there. I set out to walk my way to Stowe, and getting into a dispute with a gipsy, who, by the way, I think will remember me, I was struck down from behind by some persons unknown. Not a thing to be congratulated on, you say! I differ from you in opinion. Had I not been knocked down and left insensible, I should have been a long way towards my journey's end, and Kelmarsh would not have found me. And had he not found me in the state he did, I should not have been *here*. So you see that, throughout the greater part of my vagabond career, I have, like Ney, been the Child of Fortune."

"The recital of your adventurous career has been like a page out of a romance," said Mrs. Kelmarsh. "I declare it puts me in mind of Othello relating his hairbreadth 'scapes to Desdemona."

"With a slight difference," replied Eversley, casting a glance at the lady who was sitting pale and silent opposite to him.

"With no difference, *I* should say!" said Mrs. Kelmarsh, looking in the same direction and back again at her guest.

What there was in this little piece of badinage to cause two of the persons there present some confusion, I leave the imaginative reader to find out. I don't think it right that the writer, who, of course, not only knows all the actions and words of each of his characters, but even their inmost thoughts, should tell all he knows. One must draw the line somewhere, and why not here? Let us hope that, like the plays written by the somewhat loose dramatists of the second Charles' time, the effect is increased by leaving a little of the piece to the imagination of the reader. But certain it is, whatever Mrs. Kelmarsh might have hinted at, Bob turned slightly pale and hastily gulped down a glass of Mr. Kelmarsh's claret, and Miss Jane blushed to her beautiful eyes, which she immediately cast modestly to the table-cloth.

"And now," said Bob, turning to Mr. Kelmarsh, who it must be confessed was thinking deeply of those Melbourne town lots of which Bob was the happy possessor, "allow me in my turn to ask a few questions. What has become of my old enemy, Parkes?"

"Oh, Parkes!" said Mr. Kelmarsh, waking up from his reverie. "Well, we are not on visiting terms, are we, Jane?"

"Pray don't mention him," replied Miss Jane, while a slight red spot rose on each of her pale cheeks, and her brows straightened over her beautiful eyes, thereby denoting that she had a little brimstone in her nature. "The man was not only a villain, but an impertinent villain."

"Indeed, and that's true," said Mrs. Kelmarsh.

"He proved himself a villain in accusing you wrongfully, Mr. Eversley, and he showed himself an impertinent villain—it's no use, Jane, interrupting me, for I *will* say it—by proposing to marry somebody you know."

Bob needed not to be told whom it was his old enemy had proposed to marry. One face present at least would have told him. So he did not ask her name, but filling his glass somewhat awkwardly, he looked at Mrs. Kelmarsh, and said quietly, "I'd like to meet Parkes."

"Indeed, then," thought that little woman, "I hope you may not. But if you ever should, I'd not like to stand in that man's shoes." Then turning to her husband she said, "Arthur, Mr. Eversley was asking what has become of that odious Parkes."

"Oh, yes! I was going to tell him, but I've been thinking of those town lots of his," replied Mr. Kelmarsh. "Well, of course you know the answer he got from Jane. Then he proposed entering the firm as a partner, but my father would not stand that, so he set up for himself as a merchant in Liverpool, and I believe has made a lot of money. But his ships are considered unlucky, and the underwriters are beginning to look shy at him, though to give him his due, his name stands very well on 'Change. And I think it is time to go to bed. You'll stop, Bob, for a month or two, of course."

"Impossible!" said Eversley. "I have formed some good resolutions recently which will not admit of delay. I must be off in the morning."

The following morning, while Mr. Kelmarsh was sitting quietly in his dog-cart waiting for Bob, that

gentlemanly vagabond was engaged in a slight conversation with Miss Jane.

"You will for *my* sake make a new venture in life, Bob," she said.

"For *your* dear sake, yes," he replied.

"And come back to us—to me."

"And come back to you, if I succeed," he answered.

"After years, Bob. No matter how long. Promise me you'll come back," said the lady, who was weeping.

"If God spares me, I will come back."

"Then kiss me before you go," she cried, offering him her beautiful cheek.

"Your hand, dear Jane," he said. "Your face I am unworthy at present to touch."

The next moment Miss Jane had buried her face in the sofa, and Bob was on his way to Stowe.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Gabriel resumed his journey after his encounter with Mr. Robert Eversley, he found that Tommy was almost dead with cold and fatigue. The child's clothes were of the scantiest nature, and the nights in the month of March are apt to be severe. His feet, too, were cut, bruised, bleeding, and swollen, and altogether he was in the most pitiable condition, a sight sufficient to move even the most callous heart. Gabriel's nature was not one of the softest; but when he took the child in his arms—for he was utterly unable to stand—even *his* heart was moved to pity. "Confound her!" he said. "I wish she had fixed on anybody else to do this job! I don't mind firing a few ricks, or a house or two for that matter, and I can stand up with or without the gloves, and take my gruel like a man, but I don't like having anything to do with little 'uns like this 'ere. I'm too tender."

Tommy's teeth now began to chatter, and his limbs to shake as though he had an attack of ague; so Gabriel set him down, and taking off his coat wrapped him in it, and again took him in his arms. Now it so happened that just as Gabriel had taken Tommy up and was fixing the coat about him, just one gleam of the moon came through the

dark clouds overhead, and fell on his face, making it look paler and ghastlier than ever. Gabriel stopped, and holding the child so that the moonbeams might fall on him until the passing clouds again obscured it, he looked into the child's face and saw there such signs of intense suffering as he had never seen before. Tommy's plump, red face had become haggard and thin. His red, ripe lips were bloodless and pinched, and just sufficiently parted to give a glimpse of his white teeth. His big grey eyes were now hollow, dark underneath, and bigger than ever. Indeed, Gabriel thought he looked all eyes. "I hope I shan't have them eyes always a-staring at me in the dead o' night," he said. "I couldn't stand *that*. No, not for any money. I'd soon see if they followed me to the bottom of the river, I would."

Now, Pity having once got into Gabriel's heart, such as it was, for the next five minutes it led him a nice life of it. At first he showed some intention of struggling against it, but Pity got the upper hand of him, and he gave in. Not with good grace, I grant. He even made an apology to his worse nature. "What have you to do with Pity?" he said, addressing himself. "Pity is all very well for swells, but you're a fool, Gabriel, that's what you are. Blowed if I think 'tis Pity after all," he continued. "Marion said 'twas Fate that I should carry the kinchin! Then it must be Fate that makes me feel so queer now."

He again looked closely into Tommy's face as he lay on the hard road, and he had another bout with Pity, and came off second best. "Blame me," he

said, "if I don't think I'd be doing him a kindness to put him face downwards in the ditch, as that coward at the 'Fiddler's Rest' advised. He wouldn't feel anything, an' he'd go off as easy as—as a trapped hare. I've a good mind to, and I'm sure he'd be thankful."

There were some doubts, however, on Gabriel's mind, as to the policy of sending Tommy out of the world in so unceremonious a manner. There were certain pros and cons which had to be well weighed; so he sat himself down and began to tell them off on his fingers.

"He's nearly dead already," thought Gabriel.

"He will recover from that," said Conscience.

"He'll have nothing but labor and sorra' with them as wants him," thought Gabriel.

"That's nothing to *you*," said Conscience.

"It would be a marcy to him," thought Gabriel.

"It would be MURDER," said Conscience, "and you would swing, Gabriel, my boy."

So Conscience got the better of it, and Gabriel resumed his burden and his journey. The fatigue of the preceding night, and the results of his engagement with Mr. Bob, now began to make themselves felt, and he found Tommy getting heavier every mile he travelled. The milestones, too, were farther apart than he had ever known them, and he had to stop frequently to rest. But he still pushed on doggedly enough, for he knew every hour his journey lasted he was becoming less able to perform it. At length, just as the sun had begun to rise, he turned off the high road, and following a rough cart track which entered a dingle,

the sides of which were closely wooded, he went on until he came to a fallen tree lying by the track. "This is the place," he thought, "and they ought to be here by this time. Let us see; there's smoke rising round that bend. It's sure to be them."

Within five minutes, Gabriel, with Tommy in his arms, had entered a gipsy encampment which was formed on a level piece of ground between the cart track and one side of the dingle.

There were two vans hung round with mats, brushes, and various articles of wickerwork which the gipsies made for sale in country districts, standing on one side, while four half-starved looking horses were nibbling the coarse feg close by. Beneath them, half-a-dozen ragged urchins were already at play. A tent was pitched near the vans, and round a fire, over which was suspended a steaming caldron, were assembled five or six rough-looking men, and dark, bright-eyed women. The whole of them, though picturesque enough to a Painter's eye, it must be confessed were dirty and squalid.

When Gabriel appeared, carrying Tommy in his arms, an old beldam, who was engaged in stirring the contents of the caldron, from which a most savoury odour escaped, came towards them, and said, "So you've brought the kinchin, Gabriel!" Then lifting the coat which was drawn over Tommy's face, she added, "Is he dead or alive, honey?"

"Not much life in him," replied Gabriel. "But he isn't dead yet, I believe."

"That's a pity, honey," croaked the old woman. "He'd make a beautiful corpse."

"Maybe there's some here who'll be waked before him yet, mother," said Gabriel.

"True, honey," the old hag croaked out, as she tottered towards the fire. "Flaming homesteads, stolen children, a strong rope and a sudden drop. Never fear, Gabriel, I'll lay you out."

"Stow that, you croaking old raven," Gabriel answered, savagely. "If any one is to dance to the hangman's piping, it shan't be me. What's to prevent my blowing the gaff, if it comes to that?"

The old woman looked at him for a moment out of her bleared eyes, while her head kept nodding as though with palsy, and said, "No, Gabriel, you'll never blab! no fear, honey." Then turning to the chaldron, which she again began to stir, she mumbled, "Never fear—never fear! the knife is whetted that will cut your weasan first, Gabriel."

Whether Gabriel heard her last observation or not is uncertain, for he had carried Tommy to one of the vans, and putting his head through the door, said in a low voice, "The job is done, and here's the kinchin."

"So you've brought him, have you, Gabriel?" said a voice. "Place him inside; you need not enter yourself. Give orders for starting. We must be on the road immediately."

The interior of the van was fitted up as a living and sleeping room. There was a stove burning at one end, and on a bed made on the floor of the carriage sat Marion, with a child in her arms. Though still very beautiful, her face showed the marks of ill temper, if not of passion. When Tommy was thrust in at the door, her eyes flashed

and her brow grew dark. "At length," she thought, "I have mine enemy in my hands. 'Twas for this child that I and mine were cast out from a splendid inheritance. This puny thing to overturn my cherished plans! That inheritance you shall never know. But *if* you live, you shall remain through all your days one of the very dregs and scum of the earth."

But Tommy neither heard nor heeded her. He was lying on the bottom of the carriage with his face towards the roof, still enough now.

Seeing him lying so still, Marion knelt by his side, peered into his face, and placed her hand over his heart, the pulsations of which were now so feeble she could feel no movement. She looked at his wasted face for a moment, and as she did so, she felt just one throb of pity for one so innocent, so young. "Dead! dead! dead!" she murmured. "Perhaps it is better so. This settles all accounts between us."

She was alone with her child, and, as she thought, with her dead enemy. Her purpose was more than accomplished. Did she feel no remorse? She, who was the cause of his death! Verily, I believe none in the world. She had formed certain plans for her future, and this child had come between her and them, and though his removal could never realise those hopes she had formed, yet she had determined to remove him. Revenge was in her heart, and in striking him, she struck down the hopes and pride of another. But now, as he lay at her feet, still, pale, and deathlike, she felt that she had only paid a debt—a debt due from her and her

child. It so happened that Tommy was the one to whom that debt of vengeance was due, or rather was one of those who held her bill. So much the worse for him. Personal hatred she never had to the child. He was as nothing to her in his state *as* a child. But he was everything to her, in his relations to Orleton Manor. But now the debt was paid, she thought. There was no longer an heir to Orleton. No longer a nephew to the Squire. All that remained of the heir and of the nephew was lying at her feet, and *then* all accounts were settled between those two.

Now Tommy was not dead. It is true in a very short time he would have been, unless something were done to restore him. But at the moment these thoughts were going through Marion's brain, he was living, and knew she was bending over him, and felt her hand pressing over his heart. There was a great weight over that heart, and on his eyelids, and on his brain. He tried very hard to move, but he could not. He heard her say he was dead, and although he had been wishing himself dead for some time past, and felt that he should have been glad were it all over—for Tommy thought, "I should then be with Mamma, and should suffer no more"—yet when he heard it pronounced that he actually had passed the Styx, nature, strong even in a child, began to assert that she was not dead, and Tommy's heart began to strain and try to resume work, and his chest to almost burst with the terrible struggle going on within, and his brain to grow mad with excitement at the conflict it saw farther down the body of which it was the governing power. And there

they wrestled and fought in a mad rout, those two powers called Life and Death. And though this terrible struggle was being fought out right underneath the place where Marion had placed her hand, the only sign of the battle that appeared on the surface was a gentle trembling of the eyelid for just one second. She saw it, though, and immediately her enemy was again before her. So long as *he* lived, the nephew of Squire Burton and the heir to Orleton Manor lived. All her feelings of revenge came surging back in one great, dark, black tide, that swallowed up in its horrible depths all Love, Pity, Charity, and those other attributes which make men look on Woman as something a little less than God-like, but far above the Angels.

She immediately rose from where she had been kneeling, and going to the door of the carriage, called to her a dark-eyed, sunburnt girl of about sixteen years of age, tall and lithesome. "Here Madge," she said, "take this brat to the other van, and do not let me see him again until I ask you."

Tommy was then taken in Madge's arms and carried away. The girl was rough and uncouth, and perhaps somewhat vicious, for she had been bred of a rough and vicious race. But her heart was not yet hardened by years of crime. *She* had no hatred of the child, or debt of vengeance to pay. And so she carried Tommy away in her arms tenderly enough, and warmed him back to life on her bosom.

The camp was broken up now and in motion, journeying towards the North. The pace at which they travelled was slow, but they went creeping on

from dawn until night, occasionally stopping by the way to sell their wares, pilfer a trifle from a hedge-row, or to give chase to a stray fowl. At night the men generally absented themselves for some hours, probably to lay wires for game or rob a neighbouring henroost, for both game and poultry were plentiful in their pots. So Tommy gradually grew better, and being fed, warmed, and clothed—the latter in rags it is true—he began to gain strength, and by the time they had arrived within a few miles of Liverpool he was almost well again, and was able to move about the camp, and play with the ragged urchins of the tribe.

Two or three days after they had pitched their tents, Tommy was sitting beneath Marion's van, wondering what was to become of him—whether his uncle were living, and whether he should ever see him, or Ben, or the old nurse, any more. While he was thinking and puzzling his brain with these matters, he heard voices overhead in earnest conversation—one a woman's voice, the other a man's.

"If you are so determined to get rid of the boy, you must pay a higher price, Mistress," he heard the man say.

"Not a penny more. You take him, and thirty pounds. Do what you will with him. Keep him, *or get rid of him.*" The latter suggestion was made in a voice of peculiar harshness and significance.

"The job is dangerous, Mistress," replied the man. "*I know what you mean. You wish me to*——" The meaning of the speech was completed by the speaker passing his thumb across his throat.

"I mean nothing," said the woman, "but that you should take him. What you do with him afterwards is no concern of mine."

"The risk is great, and the money is little," the man persisted.

"There is no risk, unless you choose to make it," the woman replied. "And as to the price, to one like you it is a fortune."

"Make it another fiver, and I'll do it," the man whispered.

"Not another penny. It's idle wasting words. Here is the money. Take it, and the boy."

"Well," continued the man, as if hesitating whether to refuse point blank or not, "shall we split the difference?"

"No," said the woman. "Accept my offer, or you may repent it."

"Suppose I say No," answered the man, half defiantly.

"You'll not do that. Do you remember the 29th of November, and what happened in——"

"Hush! hush! Mistress," said the man, in a terrified whisper. "Would you have me lagged? Here, give me the gold, and I'll take the boy."

"I thought you would think better of it," replied the woman. "Here is the amount in notes."

"I'll not touch the flimsies," the man said. "I don't know where these come from. Gold carries no marks; paper is always suspicious in the hands of a man like me."

"As you like," the woman replied.

Tommy then heard the chink of gold as the woman counted the money into the man's hand, and

the next moment Marion was calling Madge to bring him to her. He immediately crept from his place of concealment and ran towards the girl, who had been kind to him.

"They are going to take me away from you, as they did from Uncle," whispered Tommy, while the tears began to run down his cheeks. "Will they always take me away from those who are kind and good to me?"

"Poor little man!" said the girl, stroking his hair. "I fear it's small kindness you'll get anywhere until you are able to look after yourself. But keep up your heart like a man, and I'll see you again some day. Now dry your eyes, and let us go."

So Tommy was taken into Marion's carriage again, and saw the beautiful vixen, with her face as hard as marble, and as pitiless as fate. The man whom he had heard in conversation with her was a bull-necked, thick-set ruffian, whose brutal features were rendered still more repulsive than nature had made them by a broken nose, and sundry other facial damages received in prize-fights. The Liverpool Chicken was down on his luck, as he observed, having been particularly unfortunate of late years in those personal encounters into which his profession brought him. Indeed, it was whispered among the knowing ones that the Chicken lacked bottom, had no stamina, and showed the white feather. "There was a time," he said to Tommy, as he led him along the road to Liverpool, "when he lived like a gent, and had his trap like the best of them. But he had met with misfortunes, or he never would

have condescended to do such a job for a paltry thirty pound. And she was an out-and-out miser at a bargain, and if it hadn't been that he had gone and done a little business on his own account that she was fly to, he would see her &c. &c. afore she got over him. Misfortin is a hard master," murmured the Chicken.

After reflecting for some time on the hardness of fate which made thirty pounds of so much consequence to him that he was ready to undertake almost any villainy for the reward, he began to wonder what object Marion had in getting rid of his little companion.

"I wonder what she wants to go and make away with the kid for," thought the Chicken. "That's her little game I'm sure, though she wouldn't say it right out. He can't be one of her brats! There's sure to be some devilry in it. I wonder if I was to turn virtuous and reform, whether it would pay. It can't be much worse than the game I'm on now. Blow me, if I could but find out who owns to him, and they'd make it worth my while, I'd restore him to his sorrowing friends, and turn preacher. They say that prize-fighters and converted thieves make a heap of money when they take to preaching."

These speculations occupied the mind of the Chicken for some considerable time. He *was* down on his luck, there was no denying. His finances were in the most disordered state, and if Virtue were a kinder mistress than Vice, why should he not serve her? "Here have I been a prop to one of the institutions of the country for the last fifteen year,

and been hammered about the head until he's as big as he is! Here have I, in my time, fought fourteen battles between the ropes an' stakes of old England, winning two, beat in seven, and selling the others, to say nothing of odd jobs on my own account, and now, in my old age, I am come to keep a rat-pit. It's enough to disgust a man as is a man. I'll just pump the young 'un."

"I say, Sonny," he said, with a horrible leer on Tommy, which was no doubt intended to win the child's heart, "what's yer name, my dear?"

"Tommy, Sir," replied the child.

"That's a nice name. Why, I was christened Tommy, too," said the Chicken. "What's your other name?"

"Burton, Sir. I am called after Papa who was an officer, and is dead. And Mamma is dead, too, but I don't think Uncle is."

"An' who is your uncle, Sonny?" asked the Chicken.

"Mr. Burton, Sir. He is called the Squire, and lives at Orleton Manor," replied Tommy.

"And is your uncle rich, my dear?" asked the Chicken.

"I believe so, Sir," said Tommy. "He said he was saving ever so much money for me against I grew up to be a man."

The Chicken's eyes glistened, and he saw in the future unlimited beef and beer, and perhaps a public of his own, if he could only find out this rich uncle. "He would become virtuous and respectable, dress in black on Sundays, and, if necessary, go to Church. Yes! he would turn over

a new leaf, and never thrash his old woman any more, leastways, never kick her unless she deserved it. She should have silk dresses, and a gold, or at any rate a pinchbeck chain around her neck, hanging in festoons over her dress. He would have a slap-up tarrier dog, and go to meeting." And as his brain gave birth to this rosy vision, a smile stole over his ugly face, and striking one hand in the palm of the other, he said, "Oh, what a beautiful futur! How happy would I be, Chicken, if I could only see you with a white apron on standing behind your own bar, and of an evenin' entertainin' your genteel customers over your pipe and gin, while the Missus served out the whack! Virtu, you're a trump! I'll reform this very minute, and begin my new career by finding out this rich an' grateful uncle. Tommy, my dear, you must learn to like me. I may be rough, but I'm wery true. Try, Tommy, to think me like your Par."

So the Chicken took Tommy home to his den, in one of the most squalid parts of Liverpool. The house in which he lived was a large one, much too large for him and his old woman, he informed Tommy; so he only lived in the most convenient part of it, namely, the cellar. "I can't bear having to go up a lot of steps, Tommy," he said, "and besides, it's cosier downstairs."

The house was situated in an alley, which literally swarmed with filth and children. The shouting, cursing, screaming, and fighting were awful. All the inhabitants of this sweet spot seemed to be either outside, or standing *in* their doors, or leaning out of the windows. The air was thick, murky, and

unwholesome. The men appeared, for the most part, drunk, and the women, Tommy thought, all had colds, their voices were so very hoarse. He was frightened, too, and clung close to the Chicken, until he was seated by that gentleman's fireside. When they descended into the cellar, the Chicken's wife, a tall, angular, hard-featured woman, whose face was embellished with a pair of black eyes, and who seemed to suffer from the prevailing hoarseness, was making a stew over a small fire. She looked up when she saw them, and said, "You've brought the kid, then. How much did she give you for the job?"

"Thirty pound," the Chicken replied.

"Thirty pound!" said his spouse. "That woman's got no conscience, Tom."

"That's true enough," replied the husband. "But listen to me, Poll. I've got a game to play now, and this here card," jerking his thumb towards Tommy, "ought to turn out trumps."

He then opened the plan of his future to the wife of his bosom, pointing out the beauties of a virtuous life and the delights of a public, in language so forcible that a gleam of hope illumined the future for just one minute, and then went suddenly out.

"It's a beautiful prospect, Tom," his wife said. "I must say I always had a hankering after a public. But you forget she's fly to that little business of yours. You know what I mean."

"Who cares?" said the Chicken, turning pale, however, and casting a hasty glance over his shoulder. "She won't blab; and if she do, we must pad the hoof."

Just then an undersized, old-looking lad, with an unnatural sharpness about him, slid down the cellar steps, and whispered as hoarsely as any of his elders, "Chicken, you had better cut your lucky. You're blown upon, and the Peelers are turning the corner."

In a moment the Chicken was on his feet. "Put the kid in the coal-hole, and meet me to-night at the old place. I'm off."

It was too late. A gentleman in a blue uniform stood on the cellar steps. "Ah! Chicken," he said, "you're wanted. You had better come quietly."

The Chicken's heart was broken. He held out his hands, saying, "Put on the darbies. I make no attempt to escape. I'm innocent and virtuous, and will have the law of you, as sure as your number is X 29."

CHAPTER IX.

UNFORTUNATELY for the Chicken, he had some few months before been concerned in the robbery of a house in the suburbs of Liverpool, and part of the stolen goods having been traced to him, all his protestations of virtue and innocence availed him but little. For the good of society, and the vindication of the law, he was tried at the Assizes, and sentenced to penal servitude. This would have been a severe blow to the most habitual criminal, but doubly so to the Chicken. It is true that, during his career, he had been engaged in many enterprises which, if they did not actually bring him within the scope of the law, yet were of a character sufficiently suspicious to bring him under the surveillance of the police. But this was his first glaring infringement of the criminal code. Indeed, had it not been, he would probably have managed it in a neater manner, and escaped detection; for, as the counsel for the prosecution assured the jury who found the Chicken guilty of burglary, "he was not only a depredator of the worst and most ruffianly type, whom it was the duty and the interest of every honest citizen to bring to punishment, but the veriest bungler. He had knavery enough for any bad action, but not

wit enough to conceal his connection with that action."

"It's hard lines," he assured his wife, with many oaths and tears. "Awful hard lines on a cove! For even if I did crack the crib and bone the swag, it was only my first job of the kind. While there are plenty of coves who have done the trick no end of times what walks about free, here I am lagged. And *such* a prospect as we had, too, old woman! That boy would have made our fortins, and no mistake. Oh, it's wery hard lines, just when a cove sees the error of his ways and was going to reform, to get nabbed like this 'ere."

"Never mind, Tom! Don't you go for to get chicken-hearted," said his wife, wiping her eyes with the corner of her shawl.

"But twenty-one year is a awful long while," the Chicken snivelled.

"You'll not be there all that time," his wife replied, endeavouring to give him some scrap of comfort. "There's Fagey Joe got a lifer, but he was out in three year, and is quite the gent out there, they tell me."

"But how is it to be managed?" asked the Chicken, plucking up some spirit. "They says there's no chance of getting away on the quiet, what with their soldiers, and warders, and all them botherations."

"Easy enough," his wife replied, "if you'll only do as I bid you. You must sulk first when you get out there, and then they'll send the Parson to you. After a bit, you must soften down, and argyfy with him, and then make out as you're convinced you've

been a awful sinner, and ask for a hymn-book, or a few tracts. He'll get werry fond of converting such a wicked 'un, and will report you to the Governor as a reformed character. After that, you must be always singing hymns, and tell your pals, when any of the warders are by, they mustn't swear; and I'll go bail you'll get your ticket in no time. They're werry tender of converted sinners out there."

"There's something in what you say, Missus," said the Chicken, "an', if virtu will get me out of this 'ere mess, I'll be virtuous from this blessed minute. So give us a pull at the bottle, old woman. It'll be the last stuff o' the right sort I'll be likely to see for some time."

His wife handed him a stone jar, which she carried beneath her shawl, and the Chicken pressed it lovingly to his mouth. It appeared to give him considerable comfort, for, after drawing a deep sigh, he again applied it to his lips, and kept it there until it was empty.

"Do you feel better now, Chicken?" asked his wife.

"Werry much so," he replied. "I only wish you had the feller to that one here."

"I'll bring it to-morrow," she said; "and it shall be a good stiff 'un, too."

"It'll be too late, old woman, to-morrow," he sighed. "I'm off out o' this in the morning, and by this time to-morrow night will be part way over the water."

"So soon!" said his wife, with her shawl pressed over her face. "Oh, Chicken! an' my time is nearly up, an' the turnkey will be here in a few minutes.

So tell me about the fortin' what's to be got out of the kid."

"What for, Missus?" asked the Chicken, becoming suspicious. "What do you want to know all about the kid for? It's a pity you didn't bring any more gin, because if I was jovial I might tell you."

"But about the fortin', Chicken," answered his wife. "I could square it all while you was away, you know."

"So you might," replied her husband, leering horribly. "And when you got the fortin', you'd be after getting another pal to comfort you while I'm away."

"Oh, Chicken!" whimpered his spouse, "how can you think as I would go and do such a mean thing? When I got it, wouldn't I go out to you, wherever you was, an' make you comfortable?"

"Well, you've got the thirty pound, haven't you?" asked the Chicken.

"But what's that?" she wept. "What's thirty pound to a desolate female?"

"That's all you're likely to get till I've got my ticket," he answered.

"But only think of the kid and his poor friends, and how they'll suffer because of losing him," pleaded the wife.

"They won't suffer half as much as me, will they?" said the Chicken, savagely. "What's losing a kid to being lagged for twenty year? There's plenty more young 'uns in the world; an' better looking 'uns, to my thinking, if they're so keen on having one. Besides that, the kid 'll keep. I mean

him to be a comfort to me in my old age. So say no more about it."

"But, Chicken, are you sure you won't tell me?" the woman persisted. "There's the turnkey comin', and I'll have to go. You'd better tell me, Chicken. And I left him quite comfortable in the coal-hole, with your pet bull-pup."

"No, I won't, and there's an end to it," said the Chicken. "You keep him close till I get out, an' you'll be a lady. But stow your gab, now, or I'll lick yer."

"Then take that! and I hope your ugly carcase 'll rot out there!" said his loving wife, hitting him on his nose. And the turnkey opening the door of the cell at this moment, she left the condemned man to his own reflections and speculations as to the relative pecuniary value of vice and virtue.

Now, the Chicken, when a messenger had come to him from Marion, had told his wife that he was required to take charge of a child, or to get rid of it, or do as he would with it; and in telling her this, he had told her all he himself knew. In making the arrangement with him, Marion had not thought it necessary or politic to confide her secret to anyone, much less to the Chicken, whom she knew to be perfectly unscrupulous where his own interests were concerned. There was no confidence between those two, even in their villainy, for Marion knew that if she or any of her people told her secret, it was no longer her own, but was a marketable commodity, and would be sold, if more were to be made by selling it than keeping it. It was true the Chicken had arrived almost at the truth with respect

to the child, by gleaning what he could from him, and surmising the rest; but a good deal more would have had to be done before he could have sold what he was paid to keep secret. These surmises stimulating his desires, which were grasping and sensual, had enabled him to jump at once from the cause to the effect; and in his imagination he saw all his animal wants supplied without stint, and his future full of sensual pleasures, to be hidden, perhaps, under a cloak of hypocrisy. The prospect was a rosy one, and on his return with Tommy he confided to his wife all his hopes and prospects. He pointed to the child as the means by which the desirable end was to be attained; but he told her nothing as to the manner in which the means were to be used. It is true she could by a similar process as that pursued by her husband probably have arrived at the same result; but either her brain was too dull, or her mind was too much occupied with the alluring prospect which he had held up before her. Certain, however, it is, she never once thought of obtaining any information which would put her in possession of the valuable secret by questioning Tommy, but regarded him after her affectionate farewell with the Chicken, if not with aversion, at least with stupid indifference, and as a burden she had better get rid of at the earliest opportunity.

In this frame of mind she returned to her cellar, and after raking together the few live coals on the grate, proceeded to imbibe the favourite beverage of those of her class, and endeavoured to soothe her wounded feelings by smoking the Chicken's pipe.

The Chicken was gone for good now, she thought. The chances were against his ever returning. She had the thirty pounds, which was a consolation under the circumstances, and then she began to calculate how long it would last her—not by carefully husbanding it and laying it out on the necessaries of life—but how far it would go in gin; how long it would last her in getting drunk every day.

It was a long time since she had seen so much money, and the amount, seen through the medium of her favourite liquor, appeared immense. During the whole of the time she was occupied in these speculations, she had filled and emptied with the utmost regularity the cracked teacup from which she had drunk her libations. The effect soon became apparent in her drowsy, sodden look, and sharp, sudden glances of ferocity at the coal-hole, in which Tommy was now fast asleep, with the bull-pup, with which he had got on terms of friendship, in his arms.

Presently she got on her feet, and after endeavouring to pour more gin from the empty bottle which stood on a rickety table by her side, she hiccupped, "Thirty pounds is a heap of money. I'll knock a quid down to-night, and get gloriously drunk. Ah, Chicken! you didn't think you'd be in quod, and that I should be enjoying myself like this, when you brought the brat here, did you?"

She then made a sudden rush at the coal-hole, and taking Tommy roughly by the arm, pulled him into the middle of the room. "Here, you little varmint, I'm going on the spree, and I can't lose sight of you. Remember, if anyone asks you who you

are, I'm your mother. If you say I'm not, I'll skin you alive, you imp of Satan." She then burst into a copious shower of gin-begotten tears, and taking Tommy in her foul embrace, hugged him to her skinny bosom, choking him with the gin fumes of her breath, and calling him "her dearest Billy," and vowing she would tear out the eyes, heart, and liver of anyone who dared to hint he was not her own baby.

Having poured out her drunken affection on the child in this manner, she drew round her angular form a faded and dirty shawl, again tried if the bottle were empty, and finding there was no more to be gained from it until replenished, she boxed Tommy's ears soundly, and then sallied out into the dark and crowded alley, grasping him firmly by the hand. Here she was accosted on all sides by females of a similar type to herself, and drunken, brutal-looking men, all of whom seemed interested in the fate of the Chicken—a fate which, by the way, if all were rewarded after their deserts, would ultimately be that of nine-tenths of them. Pity for the Chicken was expressed in forcible, if not elegant language, and the Judge, Jury, and all concerned in his apprehension and conviction were heartily execrated.

In his wife's present state, a consistent comportment, either of grief, joy, or indifference, was scarcely to be expected. In the same breath she wept copiously for her dear Chicken as the best of husbands and gentlest of men, cursed him for his brutality to her, and assured her acquaintances she did not care a "brass farden" what became of

him. Indeed, so variable were her feelings, she declared emphatically, if somewhat incoherently, she should never survive his absence, and that if the Beak had scragged him instead of lagging him, she would have expressed the utmost joy on the occasion. This latter opinion, it is true, occasioned some remarks not at all of a complimentary nature, some of the females present proposing to put her in the gutter and jump on her, while others took an opposite view.

"Sure, thin," exclaimed a slipshod matron with dishevelled locks, who, from her brogue, was evidently from the sister Isle, "didn't the dirty, broken-nosed divil bate her ivery day of his loife? Small blame to the poor craytur! Faith, thin, if it 'ad been meself, I'd h've put a knife in his ugly carcase long ago!"

This speech, so far from pleasing the ears of the Chicken's gentle mate, stirred her up to frenzy, and she proceeded to prove how unwise a thing it is to take either side in conjugal tiffs and squabbles. "Where's the woman as dares say a word agin my Chicken?" she exclaimed, fiercely brandishing her fingers, each of them ornamented with a terrible weapon of offence. "Where is she, I say? Where's the woman as 'll say a word agin my man? Let her stand out, and I'll——" &c. &c.; the etceteras meaning the surgical operations on the various organs of the unhappy woman's body who should say a word disrespectful of the Chicken's memory.

This little storm, or rather April shower, having ended in tears and mutual expressions of respect, the Chicken's wife led Tommy out into the streets,

glaring with gaslight, and crowded with people hurrying along either on business or pleasure. The child's sensations were those of terror, wonder, and utter helplessness and loneliness, and he clung to the woman's hand, and crept close to her ragged dress, as she hurried him along. Even this woman's guardianship was better, Tommy felt, than being alone among all this humanity. She was some one to cling to, even if she did curse him, starve him, and beat him.

Presently they stopped before a large house that seemed all windows and glare, in and out of whose doors poured a continual and never-ending stream of ragged, dirty, haggard, sodden men, women, and ancient-looking children. Bold, loud-talking, overdressed girls and dissipated-looking men stood on the pavement outside, whose jests, loud laughter, and scraps of obscene songs frightened Tommy. The air was full of foul oaths and blasphemy, and the whole neighbourhood reeked with vice and immorality. Following the onward stream, Tommy was led by his companion through the swinging doors into a long room, down the whole length of which emaciated, half-clothed, and wholly starved men and women were standing at a counter dram-drinking. The whole place was a blaze of light, the glare of which was intensified by a profusion of mirrors, fixed in every conceivable part. Never had Tommy seen such woe-begone, shameless, hopeless wretches as those who stood around him, or heard such sounds as their drunken, half-articulate, hoarse voices, which seemed to him like a sullen hum, of which he could gather no meaning. This hotbed

of vice was but one of the many foul excrescences which are to be found on the body corporate of all our large towns; a place in which vice is placed before its degraded votaries in its most enticing colours, with all the adventitious aids of glaring lights and bright reflecting mirrors. Tommy was in the interior of a gin-palace. Behind the bar stood a rosy-faced, corpulent, good-humoured-looking man, and a buxom, high-coloured, over-dressed woman. These were the landlord and the landlady, who superintended a number of barmen in their work of serving out the drams which were destroying both souls and bodies of their wretched customers. Presently, when the house was closed, they would go home, hear the girls play a little sacred music, have a hot supper and family prayers, or, maybe, the landlord would have a quiet pipe, talk over church matters with the curate of the parish, and subscribe liberally to a fund for the spreading of the Gospel in foreign parts.

The Chicken's wife took up her station at the bar, and called for a "go" of gin. She repeated the same order a great many times, and at length the landlord, who was a regular churchman and the father of a family himself, as he said, began to think it would be better for the reputation of his house if she left. He therefore gave orders she was to be supplied with no more spirit; and, indeed, it was quite time the order should be given, for the woman was becoming helplessly drunk.

"Here, my dear," she hiccupped to one of the barmen, "let's have another go."

"You have had enough," replied the barman.

"Come, just another," she pleaded, with drunken gravity.

"You'll get no more here, Missus; so you'd better be off," the barman replied.

"Be off! you gin-watering vagabone. I tell you I want some more, an' I can pay for it. See here," she continued, throwing a sovereign on the bar, "take the change out o' that."

"Now, my good woman," said the landlord, coming up, "you've had enough for to-night; so take up your money and go home."

"I won't!" replied the woman. "I can pay for it, an' I'll have it."

"Now, you *must* cut it," said the landlord, in a rougher voice than before. "Go home, there's a good woman. You can come some other night, you know."

"And so I mean to," she replied, hoarsely. "I mean to come a good many nights more. But I'll knock down a quid to-night, hang me if I don't!"

"Jest hear to her," shouted a tall, thin woman, who stood near. "Jest hear to her! Aint she jest drunk—Oh my! Why, she was sprung afore she come in!"

"*I* drunk!" hiccupped Tommy's guardian. "Who says I'm drunk? Let me see the woman as says I'm drunk!"

"*I* says so!" screamed the other virago, throwing her ragged headgear that did duty for a bonnet on the floor, and flinging her shawl off her skinny shoulders. "*I* says so! There now!"

"Then you're a liar!" replied the Chicken's wife, fiercely; "and I'll have yer 'art out if I swing for it."

In a moment her bonnet and shawl were off, and there arose such a sound of screaming, cursing, "Police!" "Murder!" "Turn 'em out!" "You let go my 'air!" and other cries, that Tommy was ready to die of sheer terror. The encounter was of short duration, however, for a policeman soon separated the combatants, who, as they endeavoured to repair damages, vowed they would have the law of each other if it cost them a thousand pounds.

That the case would be adjudicated on in one of the law courts was only too evident, for both were marched off, in a storm of mutual threats and curses, to the police station—Tommy clinging all the way to the torn skirts of his guardian's dress—and were locked up on the exceedingly common charge of being drunk and disorderly. Soon after they were in the cell, the woman, having expended her fury in a fierce attack on the door and walls, fell into a deep sleep; but Tommy, crouching close to his companion both for warmth and protection, remained awake, shivering and cold, until they were summoned, on the following morning, before the sitting Magistrate.

When the case was called, both women set off into such a tirade of abuse and accusation against each other that it was impossible for the Magistrate to understand, or even distinguish a word. In vain they were told to remain silent and answer such questions as should be put to them. In vain the Magistrate threatened to commit both of them for contempt of court. At length his patience—which, indeed, had been sorely tried on being accused by both parties of partiality to the other—gave way,

and he condemned both of them to fourteen days' imprisonment.

The fury and abuse which had, until this moment, been directed at each other, was now by mutual consent turned on the Magistrate. The Chicken's wife assured him he was nothing but an old woman, and her late antagonist intimated her intention, on the first opportunity, of knocking off his wig, and placing her own particular mark on his bald and venerable head.

That long-suffering and much abused gentleman's choler now being raised, he felt that he should like to pitch into somebody; so, looking round the Court, he saw the landlord of the house in which the engagement had taken place the preceding night. He determined to immolate him there and then.

"Here, you Sir!" he exclaimed, while his face became so inflamed, and his eyes glared in so dreadful a manner, that the whole Court feared he would have had an attack of apoplexy. "It appears to me you conduct your house in a most disorderly manner."

In vain the landlord protested that such a scene had never happened before—that his house was actually known in the neighbourhood as the "Bower of Concord." His Honour would not hear him.

"I tell you, man, you keep a disorderly house!" he said, getting redder and more apoplectic than ever. "And I'll be—ahem!—if Providence spares me, I'll see that representations are made in the right quarter, and that your licence shall be suspended."

Here the Clerk, who had been endeavouring to

preserve a solemn countenance during the scene, rose from his seat under the Magistrate, and whispered something in his Honour's ear.

"Most respectable man, is he?" said the Magistrate to the Clerk. "Churchwarden of his parish, and gives liberally to charities. Well, I'm glad to hear it." Then turning to the unfortunate landlord, he told him that as he had heard there had been no complaint before against his house, and that he bore a highly respectable character for private, public, and religious worth, and that, on the whole, the disturbance of the preceding night was not of his making, but that he had done his best to suppress it, he should look it over on this occasion, but he must take care never to do it any more, or the consequences might be exceedingly unpleasant.

The police officer who had taken the Chicken's wife to the station the night before now leaned over the table, and asked the Magistrate's clerk what was to be done with the child. "He was not committed, too, I suppose?" he said.

"I don't know," replied the Clerk. "He was not named in the charge-sheet, was he?"

The police officer did not know; so after spending five minutes in looking over the night's charge-sheet, on which Tommy's name could not be found, the Clerk asked the Magistrate what was to be done with the child.

"Whose child is he?" asked the Magistrate, glaring on Tommy as though he would eat him.

"The woman's as your Honour 'as just committed, your Honour," replied the police officer.

"Ah! indeed, I might have known that," said the Magistrate, severely. "The features of that woman are plainly enough reproduced in that of the child. I'll be bound to say he is already hardened in vice and has been suckled on gin. Anyone can see it in his face. I think the House of Correction, or the Reformatory for a few years and police surveillance after, would meet the requirements of the case."

Here a whispered consultation again took place. Books bound in calf were referred to amid ejaculations of "Eh! do you think so? Better send him to the Reformatory—already criminal. Gad! you're right."

After a considerable amount of humming and ah!-ing, his Honour informed the police officer that in consideration of the child's tender years, and that personally not having been engaged in the disturbance on the preceding night, except in so far as the act of clinging to the woman's gown could be construed into a breach of the peace, he would not act up to the letter of the law and send him to the Reformatory, but would order him to be taken at once to an asylum provided for the poor and indigent by an indulgent and paternal Government, and placed under a discriminating Poor-Law Board.

So Tommy was carried off, sobbing and heart-broken, by the police officer, who, indeed, tried to cheer him up and comfort him, to that large, comfortable, and well-conducted establishment known as the Workhouse.

CHAPTER X.

It is not our intention to chronicle all the minutiæ of Tommy's life in this history, as the inimitable Cervantes did for his heroes, but we shall confine ourselves to those episodes which, in our opinion, were of the most importance in a career, not, we trust, without some interest to the reader. We forbear entering into the particulars of Tommy's name being registered on the Workhouse books, of his cold bath, of how his curly head was cropped almost bare, and his almost bare back was clothed in the Poor-Law uniform of union grey. All this we intend passing over in silence, and with it the next five years of his life, which were passed in much the same manner as those of other lads in similar circumstances, during which time he received the regulation quantity of gruel, thrashings, exercise (we will not say recreation), and sleep, quite irrespective of his inclination or appetite for either.

At the time we resume his history he had been an inmate for a longer period than any of the other boys, had passed through the stages of misery—active and passive—had received his share of cuffs and kicks from those bigger than himself, been told upon by his juniors, and now was in the enjoyment

of his prerogative of licking others, which I am happy to state he did not often exercise. One thing, however, I must mention, because it appears to me almost in the light of a miracle. Tommy had never yet learned to lie or deceive. This was the more extraordinary, that there was no moral tone among those young paupers. They had either been taught both those accomplishments before they became inmates of the House, or had learned them from their elders after their admission.

Tommy was now ten years of age, and although not of a robust or healthy appearance, which is not to be wondered at, he was tall, passably strong, and very intelligent. It is probable that these qualities, rather than his long residence in the House, at this time recommended him for a post which, if not of honour, was of some small profit, and consequently of ambition to all the elder boys.

The Schoolmaster, Mr. Ebenezer Fuller, was a big, fat man of about thirty years of age. It is uncertain whether his fat were a constitutional peculiarity or the result of his way of living; but it *is* certain his appetite and his indolence matched each other, and were enormous. He always looked on taking the lads for exercise as a bore, and the least personal exertion as a thing to be shunned. So he kept a body servant, who blacked his boots, brushed his clothes, ran his errands, toasted his bread, occasionally looked after his school for him while he enjoyed his afternoon's nap, and always finished any scraps or odd pieces left from his meals. The fortunate youth who held this office certainly came in for a larger share of abuse and kicks than he

would otherwise probably have done, but this was more than compensated for by his release from all lessons and school duties, except that of watching the other boys through a hole bored with a lead pencil in the window-blind of the Master's room, and reporting what he saw, which, with most of those who had held the enviable situation, was a labour of love, and the opportunity of smoking whatever tobacco might remain in Mr. Fuller's pipe when that gentleman was asleep.

This situation, then, having become vacant through the departure of the lad who had held it to take another office as cabin-boy on board a collier, all the boys who had any ambition were on their best behaviour in order to attract the Master's eye. Stories had been circulated among them of the remains of the Master's epicurean feasts having fallen to the lot of his servants—of the rice puddings, and bread-and-butter. They told of this one having grown suddenly from a walking skeleton to the likeness of a youthful Daniel Lambert, and of that one always having his pockets full of good things with which he regaled himself in the dormitory at night. The subject was a most exciting one, and each lad hoped *he* might be the fortunate youth to whose share all these good things were to fall. On the morning, therefore, of the departure of the newly-made cabin boy, the school was intensely excited. The successor was certain to be named at once, for, like the King, the Master's fag could not only never die, but never leave. Presently the great man issued from his room in a charming undress, consisting of a shirt that might have been cleaner,

trousers, vest, and slippers, and after glancing his eye along each form, he snuffled through his nose, "Burton, come here."

At that moment Tommy was the envied and hated of nearly all his companions. Scarcely one of them but thought he himself was infinitely better fitted to black the great man's shoes, and at the same time each made a mental vow to humbug him on every possible opportunity, with the hope of sharing the perquisites of the parlour.

When Tommy entered Mr. Ebenezer's room, that gentleman was reclining in an old American-leather-covered arm-chair, with his feet placed cosily on the fender. In his hand he held a long clay pipe which he was in the act of filling, and the remains of his breakfast stood on the table.

"Now, Burton," he said, when Tommy stood before him, "this is a great favour I'm doing you, you know." Here he paused as if waiting for a reply, but Tommy remaining silent, he continued, "Now I hope you think it a great favour, Burton! You *do* think it a great favour, you know, don't you?"

"Yes, Sir," Tommy replied.

"Now that's what I like," continued Ebenezer. "I like to see a chap grateful! You'll find it very different in here to out there, I can tell you. No lessons, no lickings, no work, no nothing but to attend to me."

"Yes, Sir," said Tommy.

"And you'll have enough to eat, Burton. Good pickings, I can tell you."

"Thank you, Sir," said Tommy, thinking this

would be different from what he had been accustomed to.

"That's right! I like gratitude," said Ebenezer, as he lighted his pipe. "Gratitude, Burton, is—is the politeness of Princes. Now, pay attention to me, and I'll tell you your duties."

Tommy fixed his eyes on his Master, and his Master fixed *his* eyes on the ceiling, and began to smoke vigorously. At length he took his pipe from his mouth, expectorated with a precision and certainty of aim that would have put one-half of Broadway to shame, and said, "First and foremost, obedience. Mind that! Then silence on everything you see or hear. Mind that! If you don't, you'll get thrashed."

"Yes, Sir," said Tommy, beginning to think that perhaps this was after all but a perilous honour.

"Be sure you don't forget that, Burton. It will be very, very awkward for you if you do. Implicit obedience and grave-like silence. Otherwise, the stick. I'll show it to you presently. He's very big and very thick, and, they tell me, hits uncommon hard. But I daresay you'll find that out for yourself."

"I hope I shan't, please Sir," replied Tommy.

"Well, I hope so, too," said Ebenezer. "Thrashing a boy is very laborious, though entertaining. But I don't like it, as I'm very delicate and have to curtail some of my pleasures. Now to resume. You'll have to clean my boots every morning before I get up, and have the fire lighted here, and the kettle boiling by the time I come down. If you don't, you'll get thrashed. You will also every afternoon clean my plate."

"Yes, Sir," replied Tommy, casting his eyes on sundry pieces of crockery-ware on the table.

"You don't understand me, I'm afraid," said Ebenezer, following Tommy's eyes. "I don't mean the dishes there, but my silver. You will see presently that I have two silver teaspoons and a Britannia-metal teapot. Now I hope you comprehend what plate is."

"Yes, Sir," answered Tommy. "Two teaspoons and a teapot."

"Quite right, Burton. Now we'll go on. I'm fond of toast, well-buttered round the edges. You will have to do that; but mind, don't burn it. If you bring me any burnt toast, you'll get thrashed."

Tommy now began to think that it would be impossible for him to escape for five minutes together without a thrashing, there seemed so many penalties, and he had almost made up his mind to say he was afraid he wasn't fit for the post, when he began to feel a sinking just under the interregnum between the bottom of his waistcoat and the top of his breeches, and his eyes fell on various bits of buttered toast and an egg which remained on the table. So he mustered up his courage, and agreed with the Master.

"And now I think that's all," said Ebenezer, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "Let me see! is it all?" he continued, after a slight pause. "No! there is another trifle. Shut the door, Burton, and see if anyone is listening."

"It's all right, Sir," Tommy replied.

"I'm glad it's all right, Burton," said Ebenezer. "Now attend, and if you satisfy me with your in-

tegrity, gratitude, and faithfulness, perhaps at the end of the quarter I'll make you a present of—" He had almost said sixpence, but thinking such an immense sum would be leading Tommy into temptation, he added, "a penny."

After smoking for some few moments he continued, "You will be required, Burton, on some future and separate occasions to carry sundry notes to Mrs. Cuddle, the Governor's wife and Matron. You will also have to take similar parcels to Miss Spring, the schoolmistress, who lives on the other side of the quadrangle, and perhaps it *may* happen, you will be asked to bring something back for me. You will do this with pleasure, Burton, I have no doubt, but you must also do it with secrecy. Mrs. Cuddle must never know you have taken any message to Miss Spring, neither must Miss Spring know you have taken any notes to Mrs. Cuddle. Above all, the governor must know nothing of either. It will be necessary then, Burton, that you should watch for such times as may be most safe for transmitting these notes and for bringing anything back, but especially for the occasions when the Governor is out. If it should get known, farewell the nice pies and puddings from Mrs. Cuddle;—farewell the neckties from Miss Spring;—and then, farewell, Tommy Burton, a long farewell to your miserable life, for I'll cut you in smithereens!"

This speech, and the solemn manner in which it was delivered, so affected Tommy that he could only with a great effort gasp out "Ye-e-s, Sir."

"Very well, Burton; you will begin your duties at once," said Mr. Fuller. "Fetch me my comb.

You will find it standing on the shelf in that cupboard by the butter. Now get my boots. There, that will do. Now fix your eye at the hole in the seam of the window-blind and watch what the other boys are at, and tell me."

Tommy soon became very expert in all the little offices about his patron's person. His boots were well cleaned, his toast to his taste, and the room generally neat. After a little practice, he could also dodge round the quadrangle, and deliver notes to Mrs. Cuddle and Miss Spring without being seen, as well as any close-cropped Mercury who had preceded him. Not one of his predecessors had ever shown greater talent for watching the Governor than he. In fact, he was the very Prince of Uhlans, and could dodge the enemy or forage for his master in the most able manner. He soon became a great favourite with Ebenezer, who declared his only fault was he never seemed to have anything to tell of the other boys, and that he might as well be without a hole in his window-blind as with one. And, as he had a great many perquisites in the shape of broken victuals, not only from his master's table, but from Mrs. Cuddle and Miss Spring, and not more than two thrashings a-day on the average, he was very well contented with his place.

That the reader may understand the little play in which Tommy had a part—a minor part, it is true, but one which was necessary to the piece and the *denouément*—it must be stated that the Governor was old and decrepit, and as jealous as Bluebeard. His wife, the Matron, was young, and not averse to the tender attentions of a man

considerably her husband's junior; while the schoolmistress, Miss Spring, was not very young nor very handsome; but she made up for these small disadvantages by possessing a very warm heart—a yearning for some one on whom she could lavish her tenderest and most holy affections. In fact, she had developed a strong tendency to matrimony.

Now nothing could be better arranged. Mr. Ebenezer Fuller was willing to bestow on each of the ladies his warmest regards, in return for warm dishes and warm coloured articles for his own personal adornment. He administered to *their* romantic feelings, and they to *his* personal wants. So he sighed at, and ogled each in turn, and they sighed and made him presents, which Tommy brought to him in return for his notes containing the most tender inquiries.

It is a well-known fact—and, indeed, the author makes this statement, not merely from his own experience, but on the expressed opinions of the best authorities of ancient and modern times—that only ladies of very tender years are content with the mere sensation of loving—with whom the mere passion is everything. Elderly virgins, widows, and ladies whose lords are past their prime, desire a better understanding with the object of their affections than can be conveyed by a glance of the eye, or even a deep-drawn sigh; and if there be a little secrecy, mystery, or even a spice of naughtiness in it, they are said to be still more pleased.

It will not, therefore, be wondered at, if the

matron, whose desire we will say was merely to carry on a little flirtation unknown to her husband, should wish for something more in return for the delicacies with which she furnished Ebenezer's table at the expense of the Board of Guardians, than scraps of paper, however free they might be of tender words, or that Miss Spring's warm heart should be inclined the same way. Indeed, Mrs. Cuddle, feeling the injustice of the jealousy with which her elderly spouse had guarded her, had determined he should be guilty of injustice no longer, but that on the first occasion he absented himself of an evening, she would as surely drop in and make Mr. Fuller his tea.

Mr. Cuddle, being fond of his glass and his pipe in the society of a few friends who occasionally met at the "Rose and Crown," the opportunity was not long wanting. On the evening in question, having seen all the inmates in their dormitories, he set out for his favourite inn, informing his wife he was going out on business and should not be back before ten o'clock. No sooner had the gates closed behind him than Mrs. Cuddle proceeded to array her buxom person in her best clothes, not forgetting to hang her husband's gold chain around her neck; and having surveyed herself in the glass for a considerable time, and at length pronounced herself all right, she quietly slipped across the quadrangle and entered the rooms of Mr. Ebenezer Fuller.

At the moment of the Matron's appearance, Mr. Fuller was occupied in watching Tommy lay the table for tea. The cloth was laid, the two teaspoons were placed—one for use, the other for show—

the Britannia-metal teapot was being warmed with hot water, and the kettle was singing a quiet little tune on the hob. Tommy had placed on the table the remains of a meat-pie, a box of sardines, and the buttered toast, and was just about to put the tea in the pot, when they heard a light rap at the door.

"Who is it, Burton?" said Ebenezer, divesting himself of his coat preparatory to a brisk attack on the pie. "Just tell him if he isn't off to his dormitory this very minute, he'll catch it. It's very hard a man should be disturbed at his victuals in this manner."

Before Tommy had time to put down the tin box in which the tea was kept, the knock was repeated a little louder than before, as if to intimate that the person outside was not in the habit of being kept waiting, and immediately after, Mrs. Cuddle tripped into the room.

"Oh, Lor!" she exclaimed, on seeing Tommy, "I thought you were alone, Mr. Fuller, and I'd just step across on a little business."

Now it happened that at the very instant Mrs. Cuddle turned the handle of the door, Mr. Fuller had thought he would try what the pie was like, just to keep himself quiet until the tea was made. For that purpose he had turned back the wristbands of his shirt, and, inserting a fork into the pie, brought forth from its juicy recesses a large piece of beef which he was conveying to his mouth when the Matron made her sudden appearance. Mr. Fuller's astonishment was great. His eyes and mouth were wide open. One hand rested on the

arm of the chair as if he had been in the act of starting to his feet, the other still grasped the fork.

"Mrs. Cuddle," he presently gasped, "this visit is—is most unexpected, Ma'am." But immediately catching sight of a small basket which she was carrying he added with much spirit, as he put the meat back again into the pie and rose from his chair, "But unexpected pleasures, Mrs. Cuddle, are always the nicest."

"Indeed, then, Mr. Fuller," said the Matron, placing her handkerchief before her face, "I'm sure I don't know what brought me here."

"Business, Ma'am! business!" replied Ebenezer, directing Mrs. Cuddle's attention, by a glance, to the fact that a third party was present.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Cuddle. "Do you always keep a boy in the room with you, Mr. Fuller? Little pigs are said to have long ears."

"Very true, Ma'am," replied Ebenezer. "But as I am very delicate, and unfit for any exertion, Mrs. Cuddle, I am obliged to have some one to make my tea for me. Don't you think I do quite right?" And he turned his eyes on the Matron and smiled.

"Quite right," Mrs. Cuddle said. Then casting down her eyes and letting her hand roam towards the Britannia-metal teapot, she continued, "Do you think—hem! you'll think me *so* bold! I'm sure you will."

"Not at all, Ma'am," said Ebenezer, gallantly.

"Well, then, do you think *I* could make it for you?"

"Oh, *will* you?" asked Ebenezer, folding his

hands, and gazing at the Matron with a look of delighted expectation on his face.

"I will, Mr. Fuller," said Mrs. Cuddle, smiling.

"Oh, kind Mrs. Cuddle!" sighed Ebenezer, turning his eyes on the table. "Kind Mrs. Cuddle! I'm afraid my little table is but poorly furnished with good things, Ma'am. Rations are short and tradesmen dishonest, and, consequently, I have little to offer you."

"Never mind, Mr. Fuller!" replied the Matron, beaming on him. "I've brought my welcome with me."

"What! Mrs. Cuddle! have you brought something nice with you in that basket?" said Ebenezer, slowly and sternly, though a light in his eye, and a pleased expression of the mouth, assured the Matron she had given no offence. So she replied, seating herself on a chair by the fire, and placing the basket on her lap, "I have."

"It is wrong, Mrs. Cuddle! very wrong," said Ebenezer. Then immediately changing from grave to gay, he smiled sweetly on her, and added, "But who can blame you, Ma'am? Your nature, Mrs. Cuddle, is tender, and your heart is good. Hem! might I ask what it is you have brought with you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Fuller," replied the Matron. "I brought it for you."

"For me!" exclaimed Ebenezer, with the greatest astonishment. "Oh, dear Mrs. Cuddle!"

"Yes! you naughty man," said Mrs. Cuddle. "There's a pigeon pie."

"I am *so* fond of pigeon pie," said Ebenezer, edging his chair closer to the Matron and her basket.

"And a sponge cake," added Mrs. Cuddle, nodding, and patting the basket with her fair and fat hand.

"Another weakness of mine!" ejaculated Ebenezer, casting his eyes in ecstacy towards the ceiling.

"And a bottle of rum," added the Matron. "That's what *I* call something nice and something short." And she looked at him as much as to say, "It was no boast when I said I brought my welcome with me."

Ebenezer gazed at the Matron with a mixture of fondness and admiration. She was a buxom little woman at any time; but oh! how charming when accompanied by her basket. Then, after a few moments of silent worship, he rose from his chair, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said to Tommy, who was standing just inside the door, "Burton, go to the deuce!" adding, however, "Stay in the room outside, and tell anyone who may come that I've been in bed this two hours."

He then returned from shutting the door, walked slowly towards the Matron with a smile beaming all over his face, looked roguishly at her from out of one eye, and then placing his left arm round her chair he quietly tapped the basket which she held, saying, as he did so, "Mrs. Cuddle, may I?"

"Oh, Mr. Fuller, how can you?" the Matron replied, smiling.

"Only once, Mrs. Cuddle!" said Ebenezer, persuasively.

"Indeed, I don't know what to say!" replied Mrs. Cuddle, endeavouring to blush.

"Dear Mrs. Cuddle!" persisted Ebenezer. "*Dearest* Mrs. Cuddle, only one little one!"

"Oh, you naughty man! Well, not more than one. If you do I shall scream. I declare I shall."

"Only one, Ma'am," replied Ebenezer, joyously. "Dear Mrs. Cuddle, I promise. *Only one little peep.*" And although at that precise moment the Matron held up her face to him, being under the impression that Ebenezer was longing to press a chaste kiss on her lips, he merely lifted up the white napkin which covered the basket, and peeped at the pigeon pie, the sponge cake, and the bottle of rum.

On this little incident one could, if so inclined, fill several chapters in moralising on the absurd manner in which our desires obscure our understanding. We shall confine ourselves, however, strictly to our text, and merely say, for the enlightenment of those who are inclined to smile at Mrs. Cuddle's mistake, that her error was not at all an uncommon one. In fact, if we are to believe the reports of some of our law courts, ladies of all ages are continually putting wrong constructions on questions asked them by their male acquaintances. Mrs. Cuddle was only like the rest of us. She thought that the same feelings animated both herself and Ebenezer. And they did to a certain extent, for he had his longings and cravings too; but instead of longing to salute the good-looking Matron, he was only longing to salute the pie.

After Ebenezer had had his one little peep, there was an awkward pause for a moment or two. The matron saw she had made a mistake. She also

thought that Ebenezer was either extremely modest or extremely dull, finally settling it in her mind that it was his modesty that prevented his giving her the salute which she felt sure he must have meant. So she at once proposed making his tea.

"Mrs. Cuddle, you make me happy!" said Ebenezer, smiling unctuously on the Matron, and holding out his hand for her basket. "Can I assist you, Ma'am? Allow *me* to put the pie on the table for you?"

"Well, this is cosy!" Mrs. Cuddle remarked when they were seated. "I hope your tea is to your liking, Mr. Fuller?"

"Beautiful, Mrs. Cuddle!" replied Ebenezer.

This answer caused another mistake. That she was not ill-favoured she believed; but beautiful! Well, there was no denying that Mr. Fuller had a winning way with him.

"And how is Mr. Cuddle, Ma'am?" asked Ebenezer presently, with his mouth full of pie. "I hope the Governor is well."

"Old men, Mr. Fuller," sighed the Matron, "are never well. Their health is bad, their tempers uncertain, and, indeed, they're no good any way. Cuddle, Mr. Fuller, is nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit."

"I'm very sorry, Ma'am," replied Ebenezer. "Shall I give you a little pie? It is a beautiful pie. No! What shall I do with it then?" he continued, gazing at the small remains in the dish. "If I send it out that boy will eat it, and it will spoil him. I've a great mind to eat it myself! Do you think I might, Mrs. Cuddle?"

"Of course," replied the Matron.

"Then I will!" said Ebenezer. "If *you* tell me to do it, I will do it."

When the tea was finished, Mrs. Cuddle helped Ebenezer to remove the things, in which she displayed an activity quite juvenile. She then produced the bottle, and Ebenezer fetched two glasses, and presently there arose in the room an aroma as of milk punch. The hour was witching, the meeting mysterious, and the punch insinuating.

"I wonder, Mr. Fuller, you have never got married," said the Matron in a low voice, as she replaced her glass on the table.

Just then Ebenezer was about to take *his* glass up, and as he passed his hand towards it his fingers touched the Matron's hand, lingered on it, and then clasped it. She blushed, but did not withdraw it. Ebenezer grew bolder. He rose from his seat, chucked the Matron under the chin, gave her lips a loud smack, and said, "Mrs. Cuddle, you're a duck!"

The Matron's face was turned towards the door. At the very moment her wishes were being gratified, she turned pale, cried out, "Oh! my!" and then fell back on the floor in strong hysterics.

CHAPTER XI.

THE evening of the Matron's visit to Mr. Fuller's rooms, it happened that the Schoolmistress felt more than usually lonely. Her charges were all snoring in chorus in their dormitories, the fire somehow would not burn brightly, the shadows fell dark over the room, and Miss Spring was dull. It was to no purpose she drank several cups of strong tea, or busied herself in making a new cravat for the man she felt she could love, if he would only ask her. Unpleasant thoughts came crowding into her mind. "Here," she thought, "I am turned forty, and not married yet. The situation is not bad, but a lone woman wants something else besides bed and board and twenty pounds a year."

Presently she threw the article she was making for Ebenezer's adornment on the table with the single expression, "Drat the work." Now these three words do not seem to imply much when read by a casual observer. They may merely imply that Miss Spring was fatigued, or that her head ached, or perhaps that she had pricked her finger with her needle. On the other hand, they may convey a much stronger meaning. In the present case they

implied peevishness, disappointment, and perhaps a little suspicion.

Miss Spring was no beauty, and she knew it. She might have been younger too, though she owned but to eight-and-twenty. She had been pining in maidenhood so long that hope had almost departed. Her presents to Ebenezer had been made in the name of friendship, and had evoked from that gentle youth assurances of his profound respect and esteem. This was but slender food for the hopes of an elderly virgin to feed on. Had she been twenty years younger, fancy would have clothed those simple words with a meaning at once flattering and deceptive. But Miss Spring was an old campaigner. She had entered and fought, and come off second best in the lists of love on more than one occasion, and experience had taught her that as maidens grow older and their charms fade, they must grow bolder. It is also a fact known to all observers of human nature, that as the chances of realizing our hopes become less and the desired object recedes from view, squeamishness is thrust aside, and a desperate courage to do or die takes its place. Miss Spring had come to that time of life at which ladies do the wooing. Disappointment had not improved her temper, and in bitterness of spirit she thought that perhaps again all her sighings, and oglings, and tokens of regard, would prove to be but labour and sorrow. So she said, "Drat the work."

After gazing for some moments at the dying embers of the fire—moments in which she was discussing with herself a question which had been before her

ever since she had left off short frocks—she said, "After all the collars and neckties I have stitched for him, and the share of my board which I have sent, to say nothing of the watch-guard which cost me seventeen-and-six, though he thinks I made it of my own hair, he might have come over of an evening. It's my opinion men are all alike, and not worth thinking about." With this reflection she endeavoured to console herself, but probably not succeeding, she presently rose from her seat, and said, "Well, I'll do it. If he won't come here to see me, I'll go to see him."

Having come to this conclusion, she at once proceeded to adorn her person with the choicest articles of her wardrobe, covered up the pimple on her chin with a slip of court-plaster, toned down the high colour of her rather pinched-looking nose with violet powder, and quietly left her room; and then walking to the other side of the quadrangle, she rapped gently at the school-room door. Now, though Tommy was posted in the school-room on guard, yet, like a good many other sentinels, he was asleep at his post; and Miss Spring, receiving no answer to her gentle summons, stepped back a few paces so that she might reconnoitre the windows. The blinds were all down. Every window was dark, except one. The blind was drawn over that window too, but the room itself was lighted up. It was Ebenezer's room, and Miss Spring walked towards it, without any definite object, it is true. But upon what trifles do great events sometimes hang! No sooner did she stand opposite that window than all the bitterness, rage, disappointment, and jealousy of a slighted

elderly spinster took possession of her heart, making her eyes—now, alas, inclined to be bleary—blaze with fire, her pimpled face hot, and her thin nose, in spite of the violet powder, inflamed. On that window blind were thrown the shadows of two persons of opposite sexes. *Ebenezer had forgotten to draw the curtains.*

Who can tell what that battered, pinched, and man-forsaken old woman suffered? She had humbugged that man, made eyes at him out of her rheumy old orbs, baited her hooks, set her net for him. Yes, she had actually written him poetry about two young hearts, with which effusion he, the villain, the deceiver, had lighted his pipe. And this was the harvest! One shadow on the blind was that his burly form, the other of a woman. In a moment the enraged spinster had come to a decision. She would surprise them. She would upbraid him. She would demand back the seventeen-and-sixpenny watch-guard, the collars—probably dirty—the neck-ties, the cravats. The steaks she had sent him—squeezed out of her own rations—she could never get back. They had gone as fast as they had come, to that limbo from which good things never return. As to the woman, the wretch, the minx, she would see who *she* was. She would let all England know of the immodesty of her who could visit an unmarried man in his own rooms at night—she would scratch her eyes out.

She left the window, and opened the door of the school-room. This time she did not knock for admittance. She was determined to surprise them. In vain Tommy, who awoke from his nap on one of

the hard forms, stood in her way, and told her the Master had said he had been in bed hours ago. In vain he caught hold of the skirt of her faded green silk gown, and begged her not to enter. She took him by the collar of his jacket, and in the fury of her heart soundly boxed his ears, and offered him twopence—nay, sixpence—if he would be quiet and allow her to announce her presence to Ebenezer. And when she found Tommy's allegiance was not to be bought, she carried him kicking and struggling to the door, pushed him out, and turned the key on the inside. The next moment she had quietly opened the door of Ebenezer's sitting-room. Her vinegar face was now one burning flame, her eyes flashed with malice. And there she stood, the incarnation of jealousy, hatred, and revenge, at the very moment the faithless one saluted the Matron with a kiss, the smack of which went like a dagger to the spinster's heart. The tableau was striking and dramatic. Miss Spring stood with a grim smile on her poor old face in the doorway. Mrs. Cuddle lay kicking on the carpet. Ebenezer looked from one to the other with a guilty and horror-struck countenance, and Tommy was playing a tattoo on the schoolroom door with his pair of hobnails.

"Mr. Fuller," said the spinster, with a sniff, "I didn't know you were so pleasantly engaged. Mrs. Cuddle, I hope I see you well, though you don't look it. Perhaps your position has something to do with it, for to my mind it looks strange for a married woman to be where you are, especially when that female's husband is old and decrepit, Ma'am."

The Matron here went off in another violent fit of

hysterics, her only reply to Miss Spring's kind inquiries after her health being the mere ejaculations of "Oh, my! Oh, dear!" with an accompaniment played with the heels of her boots on the carpet. As to Ebenezer, his wits seemed to be wool-gathering. He stared miserably from one to another, in helpless idiocy.

"I hope I don't intrude, Mr. Fuller, and Ma'am!" said the spinster, sarcastically.

"Not at all!" replied Ebenezer, when he was able to speak. "Oh, dear, no! not at all. Won't you take off your shawl, Ma'am?"

"I'm much obleeged, I'm sure," the elderly virgin said. "Thank you for nothing, Mr. F. Miss Spring has pride, Sir! Yes, Sir, proper pride, and modesty, and decency, which is more than some people, who carry their heads high, can say." And here she looked thunder, lightning, and sudden death at the prostrate Matron. "Is that female, Sir, going to remain in that disgraceful position all night?" she added with a snort.

"Oh, dear! whatever shall I do?" whimpered the Matron, raising herself to a sitting posture.

"Well, Ma'am,' said Ebenezer, slowly and meekly, glancing from one fair one to the other, "under the circumstances, perhaps you had better get up. Don't you think she had, my dear Miss Spring?"

"Dear Miss Spring, indeed. Oh, you villain! Oh, you deceiver! Don't go and dear me! I'll have your—" Whatever it was Miss Spring had made up her mind to have she discreetly kept a secret, and the unfinished sentence was completed by a hysterical ha! ha! he! he!

"For Heaven's sake, my dear Mrs. Cuddle, come to! Lovely Miss Spring, *don't* go to faint. Oh, dear, what the deuce shall I do with two of them?" gasped Ebenezer, clasping his hands, and looking appealingly to both his fair visitors. "This is horrible; the prospect is appalling. No more meat pies!—no more neckties. My dear ladies, do sit up on chairs like Christians, or I don't know what'll happen."

"Come to!" screamed the spinster. "Let *her* come to, the brazen woman—the creature!"

This was more than the Matron could stand. That she was found in a most awkward dilemma she knew. It was decidedly wrong to be where she was, inasmuch as she was found out. She might take as the punishment of discovery her rival's upbraidings and scorn; but to be called a woman, and alluded to as a creature, was past forbearance.

"Me a woman!" she exclaimed, rising from the floor, and recovering from her hysteria at the same moment. "Me a creature! I'm no more a woman or a creature than yourself, you good-for-nothing!"

"Pray, my dear ladies!" said Ebenezer, piteously. "My dear Mrs. Cuddle! dear Miss Spring, do be quiet. You'll have the whole house here in a minute."

"Hear to him!" cried both ladies in a breath, turning all their wordy artillery on the unfortunate Ebenezer.

"His dear Miss Spring, indeed!" cried the Matron.

"He called her his dear Mrs. Cuddle," cried Miss Spring.

"Upon my soul, you'll send me stark raving mad!" said Ebenezer, clasping his hands, and stamping around the room. "Why the deuce don't you be quiet, and let's talk the matter over. I'll do all I can to please both of you, if you will be only reasonable."

"Where's the watch-guard I made out of my own hair?" cried Miss Spring. "Oh, you villain! give me back the collars and neckties I've sent you."

"And give me back the pies I've made you," said Mrs. Cuddle. "Oh, you deceiver! Where's my pies."

"Confound it! I'll tell you what I'll do, you two old fools. I'll ring the fire-bell in a minute, if you don't get up. There, they're fainting again! Where's the kettle, or the slop-pail? They *must* come to, or I'm undone." And Ebenezer frantically seized the kettle of boiling water with the intention of using it as a restorative. Before he could put his sagacious intention into practice, however, both of the ladies perfectly recovered themselves, and sat in their respective chairs sobbing and weeping, and muttering, "Old fool! Oh, the wretch! I was only five-and-twenty last birthday!"

"Now, ladies," said Ebenezer, when a calm had settled over his visitors, "there's a mistake here, you'll allow!" And he wiped his fat, sallow face, and low forehead, nervously with a coloured cotton pocket-handkerchief.

"You brute!" sobbed Miss Spring. "To treat me like this! Oh, my heart is broke."

"Miss Spring," said Ebenezer, "you come in at an unfortunate time, as far as appearances go."

"I should think so," wept the spinster. "Appearances were very much against that female person whom I won't condescend to name."

"Meaning me, of course, Ma'am," said Mrs. Cuddle, who, while in hysterics, had had time to collect her thoughts and arrange her plan of escape. "Much obleeged, I'm sure! but there, them's the thanks I get, when I come over purposely to speak to Mr. F., and to tell him that unless he means to act as a gentleman to a certain young person we have often spoken of in the *highest* of terms, he mustn't look to speak to *me* no more." And here the Matron shot a glance out of one eye at Ebenezer, as much as to say, "This is our cue; follow up my play, and all will be well!"

Ebenezer understood Mrs. Cuddle's glance—we will not say wink; ladies never wink—and he sighed, and cast a look of such affection on Miss Spring that that virgin felt her heart begin to melt.

"Do I say true, or do I not say true, Mr. F.?" asked the Matron.

"You say true," Ebenezer sighed.

"Did I not ask you if your intentions to a certain young person, who may think she's got a grudge against me, was honourable?" asked the Matron.

"Indeed, you did, Mrs. Cuddle, and highly you spoke of that young person," replied Ebenezer.

"And didn't you declare to me, just as a certain young person came in, that your intentions *was* honourable?" continued the Matron.

"Certainly," replied Ebenezer. "I've said it to

you, Mrs. Cuddle, millions of times if I've said it once."

"You have," said the Matron. "And those intentions to which we refer was what Mr. F.—?"

"White waistcoat, lavender kids, banns, and a parson," answered Ebenezer, smiling sweetly on the spinster. "In other words, marriage, Ma'am."

"Very well, Mr. F.," said the Matron, rising. "I hope that a certain young person, who owes me a good deal of gratitude, will now see who's her friends and who isn't, and if she'll say nothing of what's took place, I'll promise not to mention a word of her being here, for young people will be young people, and we mustn't blame her, for we was young ourselves once."

During the whole of this conversation the spinster sat in her chair with her face buried in her handkerchief. At length she opened her ears, and gradually became so interested that she forgot to sob. There was no doubt as to the young person they alluded to. It could be only herself. Not for one moment, however, was she deceived by Mrs. Cuddle or Ebenezer. Experience and age had made her hard to deceive. She believed just as much of it as Mrs. Cuddle, but she at once saw, with the eye of an old general, what an advantage it gave her in the game. Ebenezer's answers to the Matron's questions must prove a trump card, and with one bold stroke she could win the game she had been playing all her life. So when the Matron spoke of the gratitude a certain young person owed her, she rose from her chair, pressed her handkerchief over her eyes, and holding out a very yellow hand, the

finger-nails of which might have been cleaner, said, "Mrs. Cuddle, you'll excuse my feelings. You are very pretty, and your position was very awkward. Is it any wonder I was mistaken? *I* bear no malice, and you say nothing about my being here, and I'll say nothing about you lying on the floor."

"Quite natural, dear!" replied the Matron, colouring with vexation. "And now I'll go. Good-bye, dear Miss Spring."

"Good-bye, dearest Mrs. Cuddle; but you must see Ebenezer and me make it up, and then there *can* be no mistakes," said the spinster, who immediately took off her bonnet, unfastened her brooch, and murmuring the sweet name of the man she adored, cast herself like a limp sack on his bosom.

The object of these affections submitted to the fond embrace of the elderly virgin, but he did not appear to return it with anything like the warmth one would have been led to expect from his statement made a few minutes before. His arms hung loosely by his sides, instead of clasping the frail form on his breast. His eyes, it is true, rested on the spinster's vinegar face for one instant, and then looked appealingly at the buxom Matron. His lips, instead of imprinting a lover's kiss on the lady's cheek, her brow, or her eyes, pursed themselves up, and as his glance wandered from the Matron to the rum-bottle and sponge-cake on the table, said, as plainly as lips could say without articulating a sound, "*Come again another night.*"

When the Matron had left the room, Ebenezer was sadly puzzled to know what to do with his

charming burden. If she held on to him much longer, he must fall, if she did not. He cast his eyes towards the chair, and said, or rather sighed, "Miss Spring!"

"Call me Maria!" murmured the spinster, wiping her nose on his shirt front. "Am I not your own Maria now?"

"Oh, certainly!" replied Ebenezer, nervously. "Mariar, then."

"Yes, my own, own Ebby!" said the spinster, from the inside of Ebenezer's waistcoat.

Now, Ebenezer had never been called Ebby before during the whole of his life. It sounded strange in his ears—not delightfully strange, as it sounded to *you*, my dear Sir, when your wife first called *you* by the pet diminutive—but awfully strange. He felt as though he had lost himself in the old woman who clung to him—was swallowed up in her wiry embraces—as though he were no longer the well-fed, unctuous Ebenezer of old, but a new Ebenezer—an appanage of a stale, rank old frump.

"Take a chair, Mariar," said Ebenezer.

"With you, my Ebby," gently replied the virgin.

"No, Mariar! one each. A chair, Mariar, may be big enough for one, but I never saw one big enough for *two* yet." And Ebenezer, pointing to a seat near Miss Spring, seated himself as far from it as circumstances would admit of. The reason of this ungallant conduct we cannot explain. It has been whispered that Miss Spring's breath was—well, we will put it as mildly as possible and say, fatal to the life of love. It may be true or it may not be. We may, however, mention, as a fact, that

Ebenezer subsequently hinted that he was not fond of the smell of peppermints.

However, the spinster had no intention of taking Ebenezer's hint. No sooner was he seated than she pounced upon the unhappy man, fixed herself securely on his knee, which he afterwards declared was sore for a month, and fastened her lean arms about his neck. "Oh, Ebby, Ebby," she murmured to the back of his head, he having moved his face as far from her as possible, a movement probably made through shyness, "how happy should we be! Two youthful hearts now joined in one. Two pure and unsophisticated souls in heavenly communion. Onward, my Ebby, through life's tempestuous way, we will travel together. We will rejoice in each other's joy, share each other's sorrow. *Your* arm shall be my guide, *your* breast my pillow." Here she laid her head on his shoulder and disarranged her front, but continued in glowing language, "Neither time or space, my Ebby, shall ever part us more."

"It must though, Ma'am; Mariar I mean; and pretty soon too. Just you go off now to your rooms, for it's nine o'clock." And Ebenezer rose from his chair and opened the door.

It will probably be wondered what all this had to do with our hero, Tommy. It will be seen presently that it had a great deal to do with him. Everyone who will take the trouble to give the matter a thought must acknowledge that however much we may endeavour to isolate ourselves from those around us, to live our own lives, carve out our own careers, or cut ourselves off from the sympathies and influences

of our fellows, we cannot succeed. The veriest trifles which occur to our neighbours may influence our whole lives. So it was that when Miss Spring turned Tommy out of the school-room and locked the door on him, she was the instrument of turning the lad's whole career into a new channel.

While the scene we have already described was being enacted in Mr. Fuller's room, and Tommy was kicking at the school-house door, the Governor of the House returned home, after having enjoyed his pipe and his glass among his particular friends. The old gentleman's walk, never very steady, was even more erratic than usual; but he was not so far gone as to be both deaf and blind. The noise Tommy made with his boots against the door soon attracted his attention, and stepping back into the shadow of the high buildings which formed the sides of the quadrangle, he slowly approached the door on which Tommy was making his assault, and suddenly pouncing on the lad, seized him by the collar.

"You young villain, you are breaking bounds, are you?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "What are you doing here at this time o' night."

"Please, Sir!" gasped Tommy, trying to wriggle himself free from the Governor's grasp.

"Hold your tongue, you young vagabone," said the old man, shaking the boy, and half strangling him. "What are you doing here, I say?"

"Please, Sir," Tommy again began.

"Hold your tongue, this minute," the old gentleman said, again preventing Tommy from answering his question, an inconsistency, by the way, we have

known people indulge in who were not, or were supposed not to be, under the influence of the rosy god. "Oh, you won't speak, won't you? then come along o' me. I'll soon teach you whether you will defy the Governor or not."

Then dragging Tommy by the collar, indulging him occasionally with a hearty shake, the old gentleman led him to his own part of the building, and after turning up the lamp and locking the door, he seated himself in his chair, and staring at the lad with a severity born of whisky, said, "Now you young vagabone, what were you doing out when I caught you? Answer me that."

"Please, Sir, Miss Spring turned me out," said Tommy, burying his knuckles in his eyes.

"A very likely story," snarled the old gentleman. "You don't live in the girls' ward, do you? How could Miss Spring turn you out?"

"Please, Sir, she came to see Mr. Fuller, Sir," answered Tommy.

"Eh! what! came to see Mr. Fuller! Mind what you are saying. Do you know where boys will go who tell lies? Have you ever heard of Ananias and Sapphira?" said the old gentleman, wagging his venerable head like a Chief Justice.

"Yes, Sir," blubbered Tommy, "they were struck dead for telling lies."

"Then don't you tell lies, or you mayn't know what will happen. Now wasn't that a story you told about Miss Spring?"

"No, Sir," Tommy answered, "she came in at the door, and because I wouldn't let her go into the Master's room, she turned me out."

"Oh, indeed!" said the old gentleman. "Was anyone else with Mr. Fuller at the time, that you would not let Miss Spring in? Now, mind! I've got my eye on you."

"Yes, Sir," Tommy replied.

"Who was it then? Now mind you tell the truth, or you'll catch it."

"Please, Sir, Mrs. Cuddle was with him, making his tea," Tommy answered.

We have heard of persons when under the influence of liquor, being suddenly called on to exert themselves in cases of great emergency, plunging their heads into cold water and immediately becoming sober; but we doubt if all the cold water in the neighbourhood of Liverpool could have brought Mr. Cuddle back to his sober senses so quickly and perfectly as Tommy's last answer. For one moment the old gentleman seemed staggered, but immediately recovering himself, he sprung to his feet with all the agility age and infirmities had left him, and seizing Tommy by the throat, he gasped, "You young viper! If this is true, I'll—I'll kill her! if it is not true, I'll kill you." Then seizing the bell rope he rang furiously until the wire broke, and sank back in his chair, gasping and staring as though he were about to have a fit of apoplexy.

"Send Mrs. Cuddle to me at once," he said, when the servant entered the room. "At once, do you hear?"

"The Governor wants you, Mum," said the girl to Mrs. Cuddle, who had just returned. "He's in a terrible way about something."

"Indeed!" replied the Matron, turning somewhat pale, "Is anyone with him?"

"Yes, 'm, Mr. Fuller's boy, Mum."

Mrs. Cuddle turned paler for one moment, and it must be confessed, trembled. There was no doubt but that the Governor had heard of her visit to the Schoolmaster. She soon came to the conclusion to deny everything, and, as she herself would have expressed it, "brazen it out."

"Mary," she said to the girl, "I've not been hard on you since you've been here, have I?"

"No, Mum," the girl replied, folding her hands under her apron. "You've been very kind, Mum, and if I can do anything, or say anything for you, Mum, to the Governor, I will."

"Thank you, Mary," said the Matron. "You are a good girl. Here's a shilling for you, and if you do as I tell you and hold your tongue about it afterwards, I shall not forget it."

"Thank you, Mum," replied Mary, taking the shilling. "Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it. Tell me to say anything, and I'll say it, and what's more, I'll stand to it."

"Very well, Mary; you know how absurdly jealous Mr. Cuddle is—indeed, his jealousy is the torment of my life."

"Yes, 'm, indeed! We poor women has a deal to put up with," answered the sympathising maid.

"True, indeed, Mary; and so we poor women should stand by each other," said the Matron. "There! he's ringing the bell again! Just run across to Miss Spring—I've been taking tea with her, and Mr. Fuller happened to drop in. You tell

her to deny having seen me this evening, and give the same message to Mr. Fuller. Now run, Mary, and I'll step up to Mr. Cuddle."

Mary went on her errand, delighted to have an opportunity of being mixed up in an intrigue, and feeling all the pleasure of being in the Matron's confidence. As soon as she had proceeded to give the office, as she termed it, to Ebenezer and Miss Spring, the Matron marched boldly into the enemy's quarters, determined not to appear before her lord in the character of a criminal, but in that of the injured, forsaken wife.

When she entered the room, the old gentleman glared at her as though he would scorch her with his eyes, and wither her with a look. His surprise may therefore be imagined when the Matron at once began the assault by asking him what he meant by leaving her all alone for so many hours. He stared from her to Tommy and from Tommy to her in the greatest perplexity. The boy's tale agreed exactly with his own fears, but then his wife's attack on him bespoke her innocence.

"Now, Cuddle!" said the Matron, "Are you not ashamed of yourself? A man of your years ought to know better than to leave your wife alone in the long evenings. Here I've been with not a soul to speak to since you've been out. But much *you* care as long as you can get your nasty pipe and your whiskey, and sit and listen to a lot of old fools talk; you don't care what becomes of me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to come home in the state you are in. It's my opinion, Mr. Cuddle, you're drunk!"

"Great Heaven, grant me patience!" gasped the Governor.

"Grant *you* patience! grant *me* patience rather!" said the Matron with considerable asperity. "If Heaven would only grant you common sense and common decency, I would be thankful."

"It is you, Ma'am, who should pray for decency," roared the old gentleman, when at last he found his tongue and his wits. "And not only for decency, but for modesty. Where have you been this evening?"

"Well, that's good!" replied the Matron, tossing her head. "Where have *you* been? Not to Church, nor on business, I'm sure."

"That is not the question, Ma'am! Where have you been?" the old gentleman fiercely inquired.

"If you had remained at home, you would have known, Mr. Cuddle," replied the Matron. "As it is, I shall not condescend to speak any more to you in your present lamentable condition." And she turned towards the door as though she were about to leave the room.

"By Heaven, I will have an answer from somebody!" roared the Governor. "And I'll—I'll have a divorce; I'll have a separation. I'll— Here, boy! where did you see that woman this evening?"

Tommy hung his head and bit his thumb, but made no answer.

"Do you hear, you young villain? If you don't speak this minute, I'll throttle you!" And the old gentleman, in his fury, would very probably have endeavoured to Burke our hero, for paupers' lives are cheap enough, every Coroner knows.

"I saw her making Mr. Fuller's tea, Sir, when Miss Spring came," said Tommy, trembling with terror.

"There, Ma'am! what can you say to that?" asked the Governor fiercely of his wife.

"What can I say to it?" said the Matron. "Why, what else than the boy is a notorious little liar, and that you are either an old fool, or else you have bribed the young villain to traduce my character for your own vile ends. That's what I say."

"I don't believe you! I'll enter an action against you both! I'll have damages! Rasping damages!"

"Oh, he don't believe me!" said the Matron, covering her face with her pocket-handkerchief and sobbing convulsively. "Anybody's word is better than mine! Oh, why did I marry the monster? Me, that had such offers before I took up with him. Why doesn't he send for Miss Spring and Mr. Fuller then? Oh, the monster!"

What man can see a woman in tears and remain unmoved? Above all, what *old* man can view the convulsive heavings of the bosom, and listen to the heartrending sobs of a pretty *young* woman, and remain strong-hearted. If beauty is their snare, it is also their protection, as may be proved in any of our police courts at any time—nay, as was recently proved in a London police court, when a beautiful young maiden, who, unfortunately, was ignorant of the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, was found guilty of robbery, but in consideration of her good looks was ordered to come up for judgment that day hundred years, if called upon to do so. Verily, we are all soft-hearted! every one of us, from the

Methuselah on the Bench to the young urchin who lets his sister steal his porridge.

So Mr. Cuddle began to think he had probably been too hasty in his judgment, and that it was more than likely that Tommy was guilty of direct falsehood. The Schoolmaster and Miss Spring were both requested to give the Governor a few moments of their precious time, and having been prepared for the summons, both of them gallantly and sturdily rushed to the defence of the injured woman, declaring they had not seen her during the whole of the day; that they had not on that occasion or any other ever taken tea together; and that the whole story of the lad was false from beginning to end. Indeed, so very valiant was Ebenezer in so good a cause, that in the heat of the moment he declared he had never seen the Matron or Miss Spring before in the whole course of his life to his knowledge, qualifying that statement directly after, however, by saying he meant except in the Governor's presence, of course. This testimony was overwhelming. The effect, too, was considerably increased by Mrs. Cuddle having another attack of hysterics—a complaint apparently well under her command—during the whole duration of which Miss Spring was most assiduous in ministering to the injured angel on the carpet, and hurling sarcasms at the bald head of the unfortunate husband.

How was all this to end? Why, as all little disturbances of that kind always do end. The four persons most concerned left off upbraiding each other, and fell simultaneously on the unfortunate Tommy. Ebenezer swore he had known him for years as the

most incorrigible liar, and there was no hope for him. So they there and then hoisted him on the Schoolmaster's broad back, and quite oblivious of the presence of those modest ladies—who, indeed, in the exuberance of their feelings in having shifted a most awkward affair from their own shoulders to those of another, forgot even to pretend to blush—the Governor proceeded, after due preparation of his person, to inflict on the unfortunate Tommy a species of punishment with which the present writer was pretty well acquainted in his younger days, now happily gone by, and which was then known by the euphonious name of "horsing."

The Governor's arm, strengthened by rage, and shame, and jealousy, and encouraged by the plaudits of the spectators, and the shrieks of the victim, laid the strokes on vigorously, and seemed to gain new power as every stroke produced a big black wheal on the child's fair skin. In vain Tommy implored mercy! In vain he begged those tender-hearted women, who would sicken at the sight of blood, to intercede for him! In vain he appealed to those soft-hearted men whom a cockatrice's tears could move to pity, to the blinding of truth and justice. The strokes were laid on with increased force, nor did they stop until the child ceased to scream or to move—until he fell from the back that held him, lacerated, bleeding, sick, and faint.

For the perpetration of this horror, what punishment was inflicted? Go and search the records of many a Coroner! Ask the causes of ruined health, deformed bodies, and idiocy of our juvenile, and death of our aged paupers? At this very moment a

e is being investigated, in an Assize town not far n where I write these lines, of a pauper who sent from one official to another, without that o they are paid to administer, until he lay down the wayside and died of sheer starvation. A ver- will probably be given of "Died by the visitation God," and the murderer will be admonished and ected to be more careful for the future. But will not visit them with His displeasure, who once l, "Forasmuch as ye have done it to the least of se my little ones, ye have done it unto me?" en I look at the two little ones who hang by my e as I write, the answer flashes before me that punishment can be too great for torture inflicted the weak, the confiding, the young, and the inno- t. There are many Cuddles and Fullers in our y midst. Let us trust, and charitably too, that y may meet their punishment in *this* world, ier than in that to come.

CHAPTER XII.

Taking up an old number of the *Gentleman's Magazine* the other day, the present writer glanced his eye over a chapter of Mr. Joseph Hatton's story of "Christopher Kenrick"—a story, by the way, he has read three times with pleasure. The first words of the chapter were, "Reader, did you ever run away?" It immediately occurred to him that he was one of the few who could answer that question in the affirmative, and as his thoughts carried him back long years, he saw a dark, swarthy lad leaving his home with the intention of making his fortune in some far-off Eldorado. That lad was only absent from the paternal roof for three days, but his capital when he started amounting but to fourpence-halfpenny, he soon began to wish himself back again. Indeed, he has a perfect recollection of sitting down by the roadside on a heap of stones, and wishing them all penny loaves, even so early as the second day. During that short time he experienced hunger, fatigue, and an utter loneliness not to be described, and so he made up his mind to return, like the Prodigal son, though beyond this the similitude goes no further, for instead of a fatted calf a big stick awaited him at home. This short trip, how-

ever, was sufficient to show him the hopelessness of a child throwing himself alone on the world, and he has ever since regarded lads in a similar predicament with much pity. It is, then, with dim eyes the author proceeds in this chapter to relate Tommy's trials after the inhuman treatment he had received from Mr. Cuddle, as related in the preceding pages.

The next morning Tommy rose from his bed at daylight, sore, sick at heart, and unrefreshed, with the determination of putting as great a distance between himself and the scene of his torture as possible before his absence could be discovered. The wounds not only rankled on the lad's person, but they rankled in his heart. Had he been guilty of falsehood or some other fault, the probability is he would have taken his thrashing, and when the pain had ceased have thought no more about it. But, he thought, what hope could there ever be for him, so helpless, to contend against his tyrants, when he was tortured to such an extent for telling the truth! So he determined to run away.

As soon, therefore, as the aged porter appeared at his post, Tommy requested to be let out; and having on various occasions been sent on errands out of the House by Mr. Fuller, whose boy the porter knew him to be, no difficulty was made. It may be imagined he did not linger in the neighbourhood, but having shaken the dust of the place from off his feet, or in other words having discarded the Workhouse jacket and cap, the now hateful badge of his shame, he set his face towards the open country.

Had he been asked to what place he was going, he could have given no answer. All places were the same to him. He cared not where he went, provided he could but escape from those whom he had left. It may, perhaps, be wondered why he did not set his face towards Orleton Manor; but when the reader calls to mind that he was taken from his home at an age when impressions and recollections of things are but faint, and that nearly six years had elapsed since that time, he will no longer wonder that Tommy's memory of his earliest days failed him. Indeed, the only recollection he now had of those days was of the most indistinct nature, being no more than an idea that he had lived among kind people and had been much petted.

The first few miles he walked bravely enough, for he was afraid he might be pursued and overtaken. But by-and-by fear gave way to fatigue. His feet became sore, and he could scarcely proceed at all. Occasionally he got a ride in a cart or a waggon, but such fortunate chances were few and far between. The first day a beggar shared his mid-day meal with him, and strongly urged him to join him in his professional rounds, assuring him that his youth and good looks would open all the women's hearts, and prove quite a fortune to them. It is not to be wondered if Tommy was somewhat sceptical on this point. Had he not appealed in vain to Mrs. Cuddle and Miss Spring to intercede with the Governor for him? At that moment, young as he was, he believed everyone to be hard, selfish, and implacable.

The most trying time of his journey was at night. He had no money to procure him even the humblest

lodgings, and consequently he lay shivering and sleepless in an outbuilding or under a hedge. All this soon began to tell on him. Hunger, cold, and fatigue acting together on the poor child soon reduced what little strength he had, and when on the fourth morning of his flight he came in sight of the smoking factory chimneys of Manchester, he had made up his mind that here he would stop, and lay himself down in some corner and die.

It was early morning, just after dawn. The operatives were leaving their homes to proceed to those hives of industry with which Manchester abounds. Groups of pale-faced men stood at the stalls of the vendors of hot tea and coffee, getting a cheap morning meal, or straggled along the streets in twos or threes smoking their early pipes.

Among all those early risers Samuel Maggs was the earliest. He had been crying "Sweep! sweep!" for more than an hour before any of the factory people had prepared to leave their homes. In person he was a short, stout, if not tubby little man, with a very florid face on Sundays, and a pair of the most extraordinary bow legs that any individual was ever blessed with. One would swear, simply from his appearance, that he had never been up a chimney in his youth, for, as he himself was in the habit of saying, it was a tight fit for him to walk through a doorway unless he went sideways. On this morning Mr. Maggs was clothed in his professional costume, all black, and not to destroy the harmony of colour, his hands and face were black too. Over his shoulder he carried a bundle of rods, to one of which was attached a large round brush, and by his side ran a

little black boy, quite guiltless of stockings or shoes to his little black feet. Mr. Maggs was a cleaner of chimneys, and in a pretty fair way of business. His fees were not exorbitant, and consequently his connection was extensive. In fact, Providence smiled on Samuel, and in the fulness of his heart he came along the street in a doorway of which Tommy had seated himself, whistling "Awake my soul, and with the sun," in the intervals of his cries of "Sweep sweep!"

"That's a purty tune, lad," said Mr. Maggs to his son and heir, who trotted by his side. "And them's purty words we sing to it on Sundays down at Chapel."

"Not a bad 'un, Father," replied the boy, "though I knows a better one."

"Not a bad 'un! I should think not!" said Mr. Maggs. "Why, what can you say agin him, Sam?"

"Nothin' at all, Father," replied young Sam. "In fact, I like him, and I wish you'd do as he says, and no more."

"What do you mean, you black young dog?" inquired Mr. Maggs, stopping and looking at his son.

"Why, them words says, 'Awake my soul and *with* the sun.' I shouldn't mind that, but you make me wake a precious sight *sooner* than the sun, Father."

"Oh, you're a wag! that's what you are. Don't you go cutting your jokes, Sam, when we are on business. 'Tisn't professional."

"All right, Father!" said young Sam. "I'm as solemn as a Meeting-house. Just you strike up that tune agin, and I'll whistle a second to him. We'll make some slap-up music."

Mr. Maggs looked on his son with pride. Though you and I could see, my dear sir, would have en a black, sooty young urchin, yet old Sam saw neath the soot. "He's a clever chap, and no stake!" he thought. "He'll be a credit to the ofession some day. So wolatile, so light-hearted, d *such* a little beggar to whistle! It's a pleasure any one, to say nothing of a father, to sweep imblies in his company. Wery few boys can go a narrow and cramped flue like him. All the icy-work of the trade is easy to him. 'Tisn't ery lad as can go up the parlour-flue and not stake his way into the missus's bedroom. And taught him!" And Mr. Maggs chuckled with de.

"Now, father, are you going to strike up?" ked young Sam. "I can't whistle both parts, u know! You can't expect me to do that, for I ght blow my upper lip off."

"Certain'y not, Sam," replied Mr. Maggs. "Now en, off!"

Young Sam began to whistle his part with great ergy; but after a few bars, finding his perform-ce a solo, he turned towards his father to know e reason of his not joining in the duet.

Mr. Maggs had pursed up his lips and got his outh into position, but instead of bursting out into harmonious warble, they remained fixed, without iculating a single note. This had the effect of king his face express the greatest astonishment.

"Why, what's the matter, father?" asked young m. "Have you got a stroke in your mouth?"

This recalled Mr. Maggs to his senses. His lips

regained their proper position, and taking the bundle of rods and brush from his shoulder, he laid them down on the pavement, and putting his hand to the back of his son's neck, he turned that young gentleman's face towards a doorway, in which lay the inanimate form of Tommy.

"Look, Sam! there's innocence in the grip of poverty. A lamb without a shepherd, Sam," said Mr. Maggs.

As soon as young Sam saw the form his father had pointed to, he ran towards it, and, going down on his knees, he peered into Tommy's face for a moment, and then looking up, he said in a horror-struck whisper, "Oh, father, he's dead!"

"I hope not, Sam," said Mr. Maggs, examining Tommy. "No! he's only done up. We'll get him upright presently, please the pigs! He's starved, that's what he is. I know that uniform, too, Sam. I wore them there trousers when I was a young 'un. He's from the work'us."

"See, father," said Sam, who was still bending over the lad; "he moved then. Jest you watch him."

"Did he, Sam?" inquired Mr. Maggs. "Then you get a cup of coffee—extra strong, mind—and tell the chap as keeps the stall to put a little brandy in it. Here's sixpence; and now hook it!"

When young Sam returned with the hot coffee, Mr. Maggs was sitting on the door-step, holding Tommy in his arms, the head of the young lad being tenderly laid on the sweep's shoulder.

"Now then, Sam," said Mr. Maggs, "let's get some of it into him."

"Yes, father," replied young Sam; "but how are we going to do it? His mouth is shut, and he hasn't come back to his senses yet."

"That's true, Sam, and it's a pity 'tis true," said Sam's father. "You boys are all alike—you never know when to shut your mouths, nor when to open them."

"He's beginning to chatter now, father," said Sam.

"So he is," replied Mr. Maggs. "Now's your opportunity, Sam. Show yourself a man of action, and whip your finger between his teeth, and keep it there. He'll not bite—or, leastways, not hard. We can get a drop of comfort down him then."

Young Sam did as he was desired, and, after some trouble, a few drops of the hot liquid were trickling down Tommy's throat. Very tenderly did these two attend to him until he had swallowed the greater portion of the coffee. When he at length opened his eyes, he looked from one to another with the most piteous expression on his pinched face, and said, in a voice scarcely audible, "Don't take me back! They will kill me!"

"Will they, the willains?" said Mr. Maggs, with a fierce glare. "They'd better not, had they Sam? No, no, my poor chicken, we won't send you back, never fear. And if they come arter you, they'd better not show up in our quarter, had they, Sam?"

"I should think not," replied Sam. "Why, if they did, do you think as a run punce in that there case would be wrong, father?"

"Well, a run punce is a run punce," replied Mr. Maggs, slowly and deliberately; "and in all or'nary

cases of run punce, I'm dead ag'in' the man as gives it. Because why? Because it aint Englishlike, to say nothing about being Christianlike. We are chapel folks, Sam, and as such, we don't encourage fights at all; but if you must fight, I must say as how I like to see you fight fair."

"But this isn't a or'nary case, father," said young Sam. "And I've heard you say there's no rule but what has an exception."

"What a clever chap he is!" said Mr. Maggs, glancing proudly for one moment from the face of Tommy to that of his son, both now being pretty much of the same sable hue. "You have me there, Sam. I believe this is no or'nary case, and, as such, a run punce might be permitted."

"You aren't a-going to leave him here, I s'pose, father?" inquired young Sam.

"Certain'y not, Sam! Why, whatever made you think such a thing?" answered his father. "It's Providence as sends him here, and do you think as I'll fly in the face o' Providence? Certain'y not. I've been on the look-out for this 'ere ever since I've been in the perfession. This 'ere, Sam," continued Mr. Maggs, with a wave of his hand, "is exactly like my own case when I was a little shrimp of a feller about his size. Everything the same—shirt, trousers, starvation—not the least difference, except, perhaps, this 'un is a little better-looking and is a bit straighter in the leg."

"Never mind that, father," said young Sam, with a grin. "That was an accident of your birth. Wery likely you was born riding a beer-barrel, and had your legs tied under it."

"Sam," replied Mr. Maggs, casting a severe look at his son, "I owes you one for that."

"Never mind, father," said Sam, "I'll give you long credit."

"Wery well, Sam, we'll see about that the next time I get you up a flue," replied his father. "But, under present circumstances, we make no more perfessional wisits for this morning, but just toddle off home; so shoulder the instruments." And Mr. Maggs, making this last observation with the air of a surgeon who might say "Fetch me my stethoscope," lifted Tommy in his brawny arms and waddled off, followed by Sam, both whistling a lively air much in request at spiritual revivals at that time.

Mr. Maggs's residence was one of a small terrace in Hulme Street, Salford, behind the Crescent, and not very far from Peel Park. Perhaps you or I might have no great opinion of that house. The front was of yellow stucco. Mr. Maggs admired stucco. There was a small space, enclosed with iron railings, in the front, where two or three plants endeavoured not to die, but could hardly be said to live. Mr. Maggs was fond of gardening. Downstairs there were two rooms and a back kitchen, and upstairs two bedrooms and a loft. All the cleaning part of the household work was done in the back kitchen. One of the other rooms was the living room; the other was the parlour, which Mr. Maggs had furnished in an elaborate manner, having on various occasions, spread over a period of twenty years, purchased a second-hand sofa covered with horsehair, four straight-back chairs covered with the same material, on each of which articles it was im-

possible to sit or lie, on account of their extreme slippery properties; a mahogany table; and six prints, in black frames, of the Babes in the Wood.

This room, however, was not for profane use. It was opened only on state occasions and Sundays. Usually Mrs. Maggs—for there was a Mrs. Maggs, and a good, motherly soul she was—unlocked the room on the Sunday morning, and locked it up again at night. It is supposed that she and her husband gained some pleasure by struggling to keep their seats on the horsehair chairs on those days, as it added not a little to their respectability. But their son, Sam, seldom entered it. It was decidedly too solemn to suit his tastes.

It was on a Saturday morning when Mr. Maggs discovered Tommy lying in the doorway. And consequently Mrs. Maggs had to prepare and dust the parlour for the next day, which was Sunday. She was engaged in this labour of love when her husband returned home carrying Tommy in his arms.

Of course, like most other husbands, Mr. Maggs thought a good deal of his wife's acquirements as a doctor. I believe nine out of ten of the working classes have this opinion of their better halves, though the fact is their honorary degrees are earned by their good nursing. Being fully persuaded, then, that his "missus" could put Tommy straight in much quicker time than any other practioner, and his whole mind being bent on placing his patient under her charge as soon as possible, he entered the house, and seeing the parlour door open, forgot in his eagerness it was sacred to Sundays and dignity, and was about to enter, when he was brought to a proper sense

of his indiscretion by his wife, who said in the most horror-struck manner: "Why, Samwel, are you mad? Don't you know Sunday isn't come yet? And you've got on your working clothes; go out this minute into the back kitchen, and take every rag off." And then turning to her son Sam, she continued: "Sam, there's a new scrubbing-brush in the washtub. As soon as father is stripped turn the tap on him and give him a good scrubbing, and he'll do the same for you. Mind you take care of the new brush. That's the second you've finished for me within the last month."

"Now, mother," replied Mr. Maggs to his wife. "What a tongue you have to be sure. Perpetual motion I call it. Here, don't you see I've got summut for you?"

"Ay! bless me, whatever is it?" asked his wife. "Whatever in the world have you brought him here for?"

"Mother! why where be your wits?" replied Mr. Maggs. "Don't you see the lad is nearly dead, and you stand staring there when you ought to be a doctoring of him? I'm astonished at you, mother."

"Well, dear heart! what's the matter wi' the lad? Where did ye pick him up, Samwel?"

"We was whistling 'Awake my Soul,' when we saw him a-lying down on a door-step," replied Mr. Maggs. "A-lying down to die. And then it struck me all of a heap that I was in just the same fix about forty year ago. So we picked him up and here we are."

"Poor creetur!" said Mrs. Maggs. "We must

get him upstairs and put him to bed. Is he hurt, I wonder?"

"Hurt innardly I should say," replied her husband. "He looks to me as if he'd been starved. And I know what *that* means. A gnawing inside, then sick, then faint; and then, mother, unelss some one takes pity on him, it's all U.P."

"Poor dear! Bring him along, and don't rub the soot off your clothes on to the bed curtains," said Mrs. Maggs.

Tommy was tenderly carried into Mr. Maggs's best bedroom, and laid on the neatest of beds. The good woman then undressed him, and in so doing discovered the livid marks on his person, inflicted by Mr. Cuddle. She had been moved to pity before, but when she saw the black weals on the lad's fair skin, she turned sick at heart that one so young should have been subjected to such brutality.

"Here, Samwel!" she said, wiping her eyes with her apron. "See—see how some villain has been beating him. Oh, Samwel, suppose it had been our Sam." And she sat down on an old chair at the foot of the bed, and the tears of precious sympathy rolled down her face in streams.

When Mr. Maggs's attention was called to the marks on Tommy's person by his wife, his lips quivered and his eyes flashed, and one little drop rolled from his lids down his sooty face, clearing a little channel to the corner of his mouth.

"Ah, mother" he said, "you've a heart as big as a bullock when you see suffering and distress, that's what you have. And as for them as did this 'ere, by — well, I mustn't swear, but I *will* say, if

I had 'em up a nice tight flue, they should never come down again."

So Tommy, after having fallen among thieves and having been robbed and beaten, excited the sympathy of these good Samaritans, who took him into their home, and dressed his wounds and comforted him. And we may conclude this chapter with the reflection that though this world abounds in cruelty, selfishness, uncharitableness, and all those vices born of the devil, yet there is still a considerable amount of good among this leaven, and that we may be continually rubbing shoulders with the Samaritan, who, though his face may be sooty, his hands horny, and his raiment of the worst, possesses within him that which makes him an equal with the noblest—a Christian gentleman.

CHAPTER XIII.

During three weeks, Tommy lay ill in the little room over the parlour in Hulme Terrace, tenderly nursed the whole time by Mrs. Maggs. After work, old Sam and young Sam would thoroughly groom each other in the back kitchen, and then go and sit with him. In fact, while Tommy was confined to his bed, they made his room their sitting-room, and Mr. Maggs would smoke his pipe, after obtaining permission from his wife, and they would talk over the lad's sufferings and trials, expressing much pity for him, and great hatred for those who had ill-used him. He told them all he remembered of his life; but his recollection of his earlier days was very vague. His kind friends, however, by going through that arithmetical process of putting two and two together, arrived at the conclusion that if they were not entertaining an angel in disguise, the lad was certainly born to a station far above theirs.

"You look at his face, Samwel," Mrs. Maggs would say. "Isn't he handsome? You look around on any of the other children about here, and tell me if you see any of them with a face like his. Why, our Sam isn't so good-looking."

"'Deed, and that's true, mother! He do look

thoroughbred, that's a fact. As to Sam, he favours his par too much to be *very* handsome," replies Mr. Maggs. "But look here, old woman! them letters on his shoulder puzzle me. What do you make of 'em?"

"*I* know what I make of 'em," Mrs. Maggs informs her husband. "Leave me alone for that. You'll see some day I'm right."

"But what *do* you make of 'em?" inquires her husband. "How shall I know you told right, if you don't say what you think?"

"Never mind, Samwel. I'm not going to say what I think; leastways, just yet," Mrs. Maggs says. "It's a still tongue maketh a wise head."

The result of their surmises, whatever they were, was that Tommy was treated with an amount of consideration which his position in Mr. Maggs's family scarcely warranted. *He* had the chair nearest the fire in the cold evenings; the choicest parts of the dinner were given *him*; and for almost the first time in their lives, old Sam and his wife disagreed with respect to what the lad should do. Mrs. Maggs was all for sending him to school, while her husband wished to teach him his trade.

"Chimbly sweeping is all very well for the like of us," Mrs. Maggs informs her husband; "but 'tis different with him. You can see, by looking at the lad, he's not one of *our* sort."

"Wery true, mother," her husband replies. "But a good profession 'll do him no harm. Honest labour will not disgrace any gent, as long as it is honest."

This little difference of opinion was at length settled by reference to an umpire, young Sam being chosen to decide the dispute. This he did with a considerable amount of tact, taking care to offend neither of the disputants. His decision was that Tommy was to remain at home most of his time; but when a third hand was required in the business, he was to assist.

When Tommy had regained his strength, he found himself in pleasanter quarters than he ever recollected before. He had nothing to do all day but amuse himself, or perhaps occasionally help Mrs. Maggs in the preparation of dinner, an occupation he was extremely fond of, as he was then able to levy toll on the peas he shelled, or the apples he peeled. When Sam returned home with his father, Tommy would get his friend under the water-tap, and set to and groom him with such a will that Sam would often be forced to cry, "Hold, enough." A great friendship, therefore, sprang up between the two boys. Sam was always glad to get home after work, not only on account of his dinner, but of the fun which followed. And Tommy, who had been probably sitting in the house all the day, watching Mrs. Maggs do the household work, would be delighted to have some one of his own age to talk to.

For some months the time passed in this way, varied occasionally by Tommy appearing in the character of a climbing boy. This was not often, though; for, as old Sam observed to his wife, "He was getting a precious sight too big to go up an ord'nary chimbly, and if he went on in that

manner, they would have to muzzle him, and drench him pretty often with salts."

Now it unfortunately happened that Mr. Maggs's education had been somewhat neglected in early life. He might have learned both to read and write while an inmate of the workhouse which had the honour of his patronage for a short time, had he remained long enough; but being unused to the discipline maintained in establishments of that nature, he had taken an early opportunity of taking his name off the books, and throwing himself upon the world. He had never regretted that step, for, as he himself would have told you, he considered himself a successful man. Manchester, we know, boasts of her self-made men. Mr. Maggs was one of them. But at length he found out that there was something else in the world to be desired besides a good connection in the chimney line. When he saw his friends and acquaintances turn out on Sundays in Peel Park with their wives and children, he began to envy them; and, in his case, envy was akin to love. Mr. Maggs determined he would fall in love, and have a wife and a son, or, perhaps, two or three; so he at once set about it in the most business-like manner. Now, in the course of his professional visits to his clients, he was of necessity brought into contact with the domestics, and had a good opportunity of forming a tolerably correct judgment upon their merits. So when he had made up his mind "to have a shy at matrimony and housekeeping," he began to turn over in his mind the points to look for in a wife.

"Here am I," he observed to himself, "wanting

a wife, and very few gents" (here he pulled up his shirt collar, and glanced complacently at the broadcloth trousers which adorned his bow legs) "have better chances of getting what they want. I am continually in ladies' society, and I can spot a clever one, and a neat one, too, or I'm blessed! When I see them come down of a morning to let me in with their gown flung on 'em anyhow, their hair frizzy and tied in a knot behind their heads, I think they're not up to much, even though their faces may be red and handsome. Handsome is as handsome does. But Maggs, my boy, when you see 'em come down like that there, with their eyes bunged up, their faces dirty, and a big hole in their stockings, you may come to the conclusion they won't do at no price. No, Samwel, the lass you want must be cheerful and tidy at all hours of the day and night, and a beggar to work. And, dash my wig," continued Mr. Maggs, "if I haven't got the wery girl in my eye."

The result of these meditations was that Mr. Maggs appeared at the cathedral one fine morning dressed in his best clothes, with a bunch of flowers about the size of a cauliflower fastened to his buttonhole. His face was shining as though it had been French-polished, and, as he inserted the thumb of his right hand in the arm-hole of his crimson velvet waistcoat, he nudged a good-looking girl, who also seemed got up for a special occasion, with the other, and extending his arm before him so as to draw the sleeve of his coat half-way to his shoulder, thereby displaying a very white shirt and an immense quantity of cuff, he elegantly bent his elbow

in front of his companion, and said, "Hem! Mary, my lass, lay hold."

Mary did lay hold, and they appeared at the altar in company with seven other couples before the minor canon. They were all placed in a row, and the clergyman was about to commence the marriage service, when Mr. Maggs, who had displayed considerable nervousness of manner during these proceedings, coughed rather loudly, and said he begged his reverence's pardon, but was he going to marry them all of a heap? to which his reverence replied that such was his intention.

"I thought we was to be married separate, sir," said Mr. Maggs, apologetically.

"You can be, if you wish, by paying for it," replied the minor canon.

"How much?" asked Mr. Maggs, putting his hand in his pocket and rattling his money.

"Twelve and six," the minor canon said.

"What do you say, Mary?" inquired Mr. Maggs of the bride.

"Ask him if it's as good this way as the other," said Mary.

This question was put to the minor canon by Mr. Maggs, and answered in the affirmative. Indeed, he assured them it was the nicest way possible of getting married, unless in the excitement of the moment you take the wrong partners, as all those persons who frequent church to witness the tortures of the contracting parties would have considerably more to do in watching eight couples, than when one pair at a time were being made happy.

"Twelve and six is a lot of money," said Mary. "It's a nice round table."

"*And* a chair. Table ten shillings, chair two and-six," said Mr. Maggs.

"Then tell him, no!" said Mary. "We'll be married wholesale, Samwel, and save the money."

"No, it is!" replied Mr. Maggs.

But Mr. Maggs's troubles were only commencing. To be married with a lot of others was not to his mind at all, but his chagrin was infinitely greater when he was called upon to sign the register, and could not. He, a self-made and a successful man, could not write his own name; while his wife, a domestic servant, wrote hers *like print*. The thought was galling in the extreme, and it was only after he had stirred up the lions, and made faces at the monkeys at Belle Vue Gardens, where they had repaired after the ceremony, that he regained his usual good temper. His good opinion of himself he had not regained. That could only come back again when he became a good scholar, and able not only to write, but to read. So, pondering deeply for several days on the matter, he at length decided to make an offer to a schoolmaster who lived in the neighbourhood, to sweep all his chimneys for him for nothing, if he would teach him to read and write.

Mr. Maggs found his letters the queerest things in the world, and his fingers all thumbs. Moreover, he had the habit of licking his finger and trying to rub out his mistakes written in ink, as he had seen boys do on their slates. Perseverance, however, surmounts even greater difficulties than these; and twelve months after, when Mrs. Maggs was

ıght to bed with young Sam, her husband brought
ıe carefully smothered in wrappers, not another
y, but a copy-book full of his own writing, and
's Book of Martyrs, which he proceeded to read
ıis wife and son, not being compelled to spell
e than one word in each line.

hat was the proudest day of his life. He not
was the happy possessor of a son and heir, but
book, and that book he could read. The long
er evenings were now beguiled with reading, and
ınsiderable amount of spelling. Before young
ı could walk, he had heard the history of the
tyrs from beginning to end, and the comments
is parents on the tales of horror it contained.
learned his letters from it. It was his primer
lesson book. Indeed, so great an institution
it become in Mr. Maggs's establishment, that it
referred to on every occasion as an exponent of
ion, morality, and philosophy.

Then Tommy became an inmate of Mr. Maggs's
e, he was also introduced to Fox's Martyrs, and
mmended to study it. This he did, you may be
. If one has a fondness for reading, it is pretty
ıin to be developed by idleness. Now, though
my was not naturally idle, yet during the
ɔd of convalescence he took to the book like a
and delightful friend, and stored his mind with
; contained. When he became strong, he was
thrown in a great measure on reading as a
ns of killing time, and when the warm weather
ɜ with the summer months, he would fix himself
ıhe curb of the pavement, and pore over the
s for hours.

In the hours passed in this manner, he sometimes saw an old man pass in and out of the adjoining house. This may not seem a remarkable fact, but it must be remembered that if not privacy, at least quiet, was the charm of Hulme Terrace; and the old gentleman being the only person who appeared to have no occupation to take him from home, Tommy at length became interested in him, and it may as well be confessed that the old gentleman became equally interested in Tommy. He was a strange-looking old man, very short and stout, very untidy in his person, very snuffy, and with a very large nose, which was ornamented by a large wart, on which grew a clump of bristles. All this Tommy had noticed; and from occasionally watching him, he began to wonder who, and what he was. So he inquired of Mrs. Maggs, but she, unlike many other folks, was of opinion, that if everyone looked well after their own affairs, it was quite as much as could be expected of them.

The reason of this the present writer is quite unable to ascertain. He has thought it over, and investigated it with a perseverance which should have commanded success. Should he ever solve the riddle, he will write a paper on the subject, and submit it to the Philosophical Society. The only surmise that will bear any discussion whatever, is that the Maggses were exceedingly low and ignorant people, and that this peculiarity must be ascribed to the accidents of birth and education—or rather, want of education. And this opinion seems to him the more probable, inasmuch as he has found that people in a higher state of society, those who consider themselves the

salt of the earth in fact, are not to be charged with this peculiarity. Indeed, on the contrary, they appear to make other peoples' business the great concern of their lives, and canvass all they know of their dear friends, and, not unfrequently, a good deal that owes its origin to their own fertile imaginations.

Mrs. Maggs, therefore, informed Tommy that she not only did not know who or what the old gentleman was, but that she was blessed if she cared, and that she considered she had done her duty in life as long as she kept the house clean, got the dinner ready, and mended their clothes. She further endeavoured to sow the seeds of this doctrine—a doctrine unworthy all free-born English subjects, and one that is utterly scouted in our rural districts—by solemnly inquiring whether Tommy knew how the streets of Jerusalem were kept clean. This was a question that might puzzle older heads than his. Indeed, not only are a vast number of the inhabitants of our large towns and remote country districts unable to give a satisfactory answer to this question, but they probably have never heard of there being such a place as Jerusalem, and certainly never heard of the divine tragedy accomplished there. So Tommy replied that he was unaware of the means referred to by Mrs. Maggs.

"Well, then, I'll tell you, Tommy," she replied. "And mind you don't go for to forget it. *Everybody swept before his own door.*"

This information rather puzzled Tommy. He could see no connection between the streets of Jerusalem and the old gentleman he was anxious

to hear about. But as he grew older, and saw more of the world, especially of those high and mighty ones of whom we have spoken, he put his own construction on Mrs. Maggs's speech. But at the time of which we write, he could only be sorry not having obtained the information he sought. However, as with Master Norval, Heaven soon granted what his dear Mrs. Maggs denied.

Sitting one sunny morning in his usual place on the pavement when the old gentleman passed him, he was fortunate enough to do him a slight service. When he came opposite Tommy, he inserted his forefinger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, and took a pinch of snuff. This was no uncommon occurrence, if his shirt front could be accepted as evidence; but whether on this particular occasion he took an extra large pinch, or whether a fly got up his nose and tickled him, is uncertain. Whatever the cause may have been, however, he was seized with a violent fit of sneezing, and in sneezing he dropped his stick. It also happened that on this particular morning the old gentleman had felt a slight return of his rheumatism, so that when he tried to pick his stick up, he not only failed to do it, but almost fell down too.

Now Tommy saw the predicament the old gentleman was in, and running at once to his assistance, said, "Will you let me help you, Sir? Here is your stick."

"Thank you, young Sir," replied the old gentleman. "Your back is suppler than mine, but then you do not carry the weight of threescore years. What is your name, my little man?"

"Thomas Burton, Sir," Tommy replied.

"And what are you reading? Is it the history of Jack the Giant Killer?"

"No, Sir," said Tommy. "It is Fox's Book of Martyrs! I have read it all through twice already."

"Yours is a strange fancy, isn't it?" said the old gentleman, smiling. "When I was a little fellow like you I liked fairy tales, and books of adventure."

"Please, Sir," Tommy replied, "this is the only book we have. I live with Mr. Maggs, Sir."

"Oh, you live with my good neighbour Mr. Maggs, do you? Then you are the boy he found in the streets some time ago?"

"Yes, Sir," Tommy answered, as the tears rose to his eyes.

"Are you fond of reading? Yes? Then if you will come into my house, I can perhaps lend you a book quite as interesting as the history of the Martyrs; and you may take it and read it to Mr. Maggs in the evenings if you like."

"Oh, thank you," said Tommy. "I should like to so much."

"Then come along," said the old gentleman. "Here is the house. Now, open the door. Walk in, Sir."

When they entered, an old lady, dressed poorly but with the utmost neatness, looked up from the stockings she was knitting, and glancing over her spectacles at them, said, "Ishmael, whom have you with you?"

"My dear, this is Mr. Thomas Burton, a friend of our neighbour Maggs, who has done me the

favour of restoring my stick which I dropped just now. A young gentleman so devoted to literature, that having no other book, he has read Fox's Book of Martyrs twice over. Think of that, my dear! twice over!"

Then turning to Tommy, while his luminous eye—by-the-by, he had but one eye, but that was a regular piercer, as young Sam said—twinkled with fun, he said, "Mr. Burton, my name is Ishmael Drust, Sir, a poor student all my life, a martyr to the terrible habit of reading everything I can lay my hands on. This lady is Mrs. Drust, who I daresay will tell you that her husband is a lazy, incorrigible dreamer." And the old gentleman took another pinch of snuff, scattering it plentifully over his shirt front and waistcoat, and looking as though he thought he had another book before him to read.

"Come here to me, my child," said the old lady, smiling kindly on Tommy. "You must not take notice of what he is saying. You will know him better, perhaps, by-and-by. He is the cleverest man in England, and can tell you anything you may wish to know. I believe, Master Thomas, there is no knowledge hidden from my husband's eyes."

"Eye, you mean, my dear," said Mr. Drust, coughing and chuckling. "There's only one! But never mind, Thomas. Come upstairs and see my den."

Mr. Drust hobbled up a narrow staircase, followed by Tommy, and opening a door on the landing, showed him into a low, long room, in which everything seemed in the utmost confusion. Round the

walls were placed shelves from the uncarpeted floor to the ceiling, and every shelf was full of books. Books lay in piles on the floor, on the table, in the window seat. There were also numbers of bottles with glass stoppers, and curiously-shaped glass tubes, of whose use Tommy was profoundly ignorant.

"Here" said the old gentleman enthusiastically, 'are my friends, in whose society I have passed my life. Books, Thomas, that are always the same, in joy, or adversity. They are friends, my boy, that never turn their backs on you. In sorrow, your comforters,—in gladness, boon companions. There is wealth! there are treasures!"

"And have you read *all* of them?" inquired Tommy with awe.

"Read them!" answered the old gentleman, again taking snuff. "Have I not said they are my friends? I know them all, Sir! all! And the more I see them the more I love them. You, too, shall make friends of them if you like? And look here! Do you see these glass instruments? With these I can bring to light the mysteries of the earth! With these, if I were an active man, which thank God I'm not, I could bring to light incalculable wealth, Thomas—wealth, such as you read of in the Arabian Nights. But perhaps you have never read the Arabian Nights. I will send you the book, and before we break off our acquaintance, formed to-day, you shall be a chemist, my boy. My life has been spent in dreaming of what I might have done. Your life is before you."

"Thank you, Sir," Tommy replied. "But I'm afraid I shall not be able to learn all you tell me. I am no scholar, Sir."

"All the better," said the old gentleman, rubbing his hands. "All the better! I've often wished for a pupil, who could learn all from me, without having to unlearn the clumsy work of some bungling master. I'm getting old, Thomas, and perhaps some day you will be able to help me. What do you say? Would you like to spend two or three hours daily in this room?"

Tommy said he should like it very much; so the old gentleman patted him kindly on his head, took another pinch of snuff, and then took down a book from one of the shelves, and handed it to Tommy saying, "Here's the book I spoke of, Thomas—the Arabian Nights. You may take it home, and read it in the evenings to Mr. Maggs and his amiable family."

Tommy took the precious volume and proceeded to look over its illustrations. The lad's heart shone through his eyes. Here was a glorious peep at a strange life. How he would revel in the wonderful stories! It was the opening of a fairy-land to him.

After watching him for a few moments, Mr. Drust patted him on his shoulder, and said "Now, Thomas, you had better go. Mr. Maggs will be waiting for you; and besides that, we are expecting a lady here with her little daughter, whom she will leave in my wife's charge. We are poor, Thomas, and every little is help, if it does not tear me from my old friends there on the shelf."

"Is the young lady going to live with you, Sir?" asked Tommy.

"Yes," the old gentleman answered. "And perhaps she will be a fellow pupil of yours. Now come."

When they descended to the kitchen, Tommy saw seated near the fire a dark, middle-aged woman, dressed with great neatness, and of considerable beauty even yet. By her side was a young girl of about ten years of age, tall, slim, and dark, with wonderful raven hair, and liquid grey eyes. The child was of the most exquisite beauty, though she bore no resemblance to the lady who was with her.

"This is Mrs. Zulmann, Ishmael," said Mrs. Drust.

The old gentleman made her a courtly bow. "This young lady, I presume, is your daughter, Madam!"

"Yes," replied the dark lady. "Marion, speak to Mr. Drust." Then turning again to the old gentleman, she continued: "I have arranged everything with your wife. She will attend a school for dramatic pupils, as I intend her for the stage. Is that young gentleman your son?"

"No," replied the old gentleman. "Pardon me, I had forgotten. Madam Zulmann, allow me to present to you Mr. Thomas Burton, a young gentleman in the pursuit of knowledge." And he waved his hand towards Tommy, and made another stately bow to the lady.

The moment Madam Zulmann heard the name pronounced, she gave the boy a deep, searching look from her dark splendid eyes, over which the brows fell, and a gleam of light shot from them, that might have terrified him had he noticed it. Tommy had correctly imitated the old gentleman's bow, and failed to see the glance.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Madam Zulmann, who was no other than Marion, the gipsy, saw Tommy at Mr. Drust's, his likeness to some person or persons she had known, struck her forcibly. This was the reason of her asking the old gentleman whether he was his son. Had the question not forced itself upon her as to who he was, she would never have inquired. Mere idle curiosity, though said to be characteristic of the sex, was not a failing of hers. For many years she had had but one thought, but one ambition. This had grown upon her so much as positively to become a disease. In years gone by, her ambition had been to become the mistress of Orleton Manor; but when the appearance of the Squire's nephew checkmated her, she had determined to remove that obstacle. Not that this would have brought her nearer her goal, but from her education and life among a class who had a firm faith in destiny, especially when clever knavery was the handmaid of destiny, she had hoped that when the heir was removed, something *might* turn up in the course of years, which would give her or her daughter a chance of succeeding to the Squire's wealth.

It must not be supposed from this that Marion

was simply eager after the Squire's riches. For the mere fact of possessing wealth she cared but little. Her life simply displayed the curious workings of the human mind. She had begun by desiring a certain thing, and at last actually persuaded herself that what she desired was hers of right; and to gain her rights she thought the end would justify the means. A firm belief in destiny is a beautiful faith, especially if mixed up with a spice of religion. It is even more accommodating than the doctrine of the confessional and priestly absolution. When you wish to do an action, the propriety of which you may somewhat doubt, you have only to persuade yourself that it is your destiny to do it, and lo! your conscience sleeps,—and then quote Saint Paul's saying, "that where there is no condemnation there is no sin," and you are all right. You, my dear Sir, or you, my dear Madam, professing the strictest views of morality and religion, will, perhaps, be induced to cry out against this doctrine. Indeed, I believe very few persons would, on any pretext, profess it even to themselves. But in your experience of this world have you always found your friends live strictly up to their professions? Have you never known their actions somewhat inconsistent with their doctrine? Nay, can you yourself lay your hand on your heart and solemnly declare *you* have never travelled one road, when you had intimated you were going by another? If you can do this you are too good for this wicked world, and another and purer sphere should have the benefit of your patronage as soon as possible.

When Tommy's name, then, was announced to

Madam Zulmann, she at once recognized him as the obstacle in her path to the goal to which all her thoughts pointed. The boy was unknown to any one else it was true, but she felt that as long as he remained alive, there was always a chance of his appearing and gaining his heritage. Up until this time she had been living in the hopes that Tommy had died. The Chicken's wife, on her release from prison, had told her the lad was dead, and she had believed her. Had she only taken the precaution to have made inquiries at the police-court, she would years ago have discovered him. But it suited her to believe he was dead—it chimed in with her wishes—and so she had believed it. But here, at a moment when she least expected it, the heir-at-law, and the heiress she had determined to make in defiance of law, stood face to face, and as Tommy bent his head before her in a remarkably good imitation of the old gentleman's courtly bow, all the bitterness and hatred of former years which had slumbered in Tommy's supposed and wished-for grave, suddenly awoke.

After leaving her daughter in the charge of Mrs. Drust, she proceeded to Liverpool, and the same evening discovered the residence of the Chicken's wife. The woman was full of energy and fire, and felt that every moment was precious to her, as she walked swiftly and with bent brows and gloomy looks to the reeking den in which the Chicken's wife lived. She found her bemoaning her unfortunate state in having no money with which to purchase gin. That woman must have had an iron constitution, or she must have died years before of her

excesses. As it was, she looked a shrivelled, haggard, loathsome wretch, whose end would probably be of drink, homeless and friendless. At first she declared that Tommy had died—died even in her arms. And in making this observation she shed copious tears. It was useless, however, with one of Marion's hard nature. All the tears ever shed, even were they tears of genuine sorrow, would not move *her* heart. She told the woman she came for the truth, and nothing but the truth, and after reminding her of one or two incidents in her life, which would not bear the light, she obtained it. The Chicken's wife told her of her misfortune, and the unjust manner in which the Magistrate had treated her, declaring that the lad was with her during her trial, but that afterwards she had never seen nor heard of him, and had supposed he was dead, whenever she did happen to give the matter a thought.

"He is not dead!" said Marion, fixing her eyes on the woman. "I had been better pleased if he were."

"And what better would you be of his death, Mistress?" asked the Chicken's wife. "My man told me before he was lagged that there was a fortune in the boy. Are you in want of his fortune that you are so anxious about him?"

"Are you in want of money?" replied Marion, evading the question.

"Ay! that I am, deary. I'm dying for the want of gin!" the other said wildly, and holding out her emaciated hand as if to clutch the coin she coveted. "Give me money, Mistress! give me money! I'll do

anything for money. Without money they will not give me gin, and I'm dying for want of it. O! deary, if you only knew what a burning, burning, gnawing hell I have here, you would give me money." And she struck her sunken chest with her bony hand, and sank back on the heap of rags on which she crouched, coughing as though she would choke.

"Listen, then!" said Marion slowly. "I know the boy is alive, for I have seen him. You will go to Manchester to-morrow, after you are provided with better clothes, and watch for him. I will give you the address. The boy has been taken in out of charity by some people who will not give him up unless good reason is given why they should. You will wait about the place he lives in, and when you find him in the streets, claim him boldly as your son. No one can contradict you, for no one knows his parentage. If any disturbance takes place, assistance will be at hand, and he must be brought here, and I will take charge of him after. If you perform this to my satisfaction, I will give you ten pounds—a sum, woman, that will be enough to kill you." And she smiled on the wretch near her, with contempt.

"Ten pounds isn't much, Mistress," grumbled the woman. "If I am caught at it I may be lagged like my man, and ten pound isn't much for what might turn out a lifer. But, deary, you'll make it a couple of quid more, won't you?" she continued, with a hideous attempt at coaxing.

"Not a farthing!" replied Marion. "Take it if you like; if not, die as you are."

"Ay! but you're hard on a poor lone woman," pleaded the Chicken's wife. "I don't want to refuse you! but you'll stand a bottle of gin over it, won't you?" And she tried to smile.

"No!" answered Marion. "Bring me the boy, and you may kill yourself with gin as quickly as you like."

"Then I'm blessed if I don't do it," said the woman. "A hard spree, and an insensible death under the glare of the lamps, is better than dying in this hole of the horrors."

The next day the Chicken's wife was furnished with clothes to replace the rags she wore, and money to pay her fare to Manchester. Marion would not trust her alone, so Gabriel was deputed to keep her company, and to take care she did not lose sight of her mission in her fondness for drink. For two days she prowled about Hulme Street, without seeing the object of her search, merely bringing herself under the notice of the policeman who was on that beat. She was therefore watched in her turn, and the policeman's suspicions seemed to him to be confirmed when he saw her on several occasions in conversation with Gabriel, whose general appearance, it must be confessed, was not much in his favour.

At length, however, fortune seemed to favour them. A lad, who appeared to be of the same age as Tommy ought to be, left Hulme Terrace, and walked towards Deansgate. He was closely followed by the Chicken's wife, who, when the lad stepped to stare in at a shop window, went up to him, and gave him a swinging box on the ear. This may appear a rather startling mode of claiming a lost child; but

it had been thought over by the Chicken's wife. She observed to herself, that had he been really her child, and had run away, she should most undoubtedly give it him; and as she had to represent the forsaken parent, she thought it better to act her part in the most natural and forcible manner possible.

So, while the lad was staring into the shop window, she came up behind him, boxed his ears well, and said, "Oh Tommy, you young warmint! I've found you at last, have I? Why did you go for to break your poor mother's heart, you young willain?" And again her bony hands were applied to the lad's ears.

"You give over, will you," roared the lad. "Who are you a punching of?"

"Who am I?" said the woman. "I'm your mother, you unnat'ral boy, whose heart you bruk by running away from her."

"You be blowed," exclaimed the lad, aiming a blow at his self-constituted mother, which knocked her bonnet off. "You're drunk, you are! I'd smell you a mile off."

"I'm drunk, you young spawn! I'll let you know whether I'm drunk," screamed the now infuriated woman. "I'll squeeze your windpipe for you, my covey. Come along o' me, or I'll have yer liver out."

"Will you?" roared the lad. "Do it, mum! I'll see what timber your legs are made of, you dirty old drab. Leave go, or I'll put my clogs about you, and no mistake."

While this little scene was taking place, a crowd

had collected, some of whom bade the boy go in and win, while others advised the woman to murder him there and then. But just when it became probable that the backers of both parties might take an active part in the dispute, the policeman, who had been watching the Chicken's wife, came up and demanded to know the cause of the disturbance. While the woman was protesting she only claimed her son, and the chances were very great she would get locked up for creating an uproar, the boy suddenly felt himself in a grasp of iron, and the next moment he was being hurried up a back street by Gabriel.

"You recollect me, don't you?" said Gabriel. "Now, if you say a word, I'll cut your throat. You come with me quietly, and I'll not hurt you. Step out."

"I haven't gone and done nothing," cried the lad, digging his fists into his eyes, and wiping his nose on the sleeve of his coat. "What do you want of me, I should like to know?"

"You had better hold your tongue!" said Gabriel. "I said just now I don't want to hurt you; but if you make any more noise, I'll cut your tongue out. Now come along."

Gabriel, holding the lad firmly by the arm, hurried him along, crying all the way, until they had got into the suburbs of Salford. Now, unfortunately for him, Mr. Maggs had been professionally engaged that afternoon in cleaning the chimneys of an unoccupied house at Higher Broughton. Having finished his work, he shouldered his bundle of rods with the brush on the top of them, and started off

wards home, whistling his favourite air, and
inking what a jolly time of it they would have
fter supper, listening to Tommy reading the adven-
ures of the Caliph of Bagdad. He had crossed
the bridge, and had just got to the end of "Awake,
my soul," and was giving his usual flourish, when
a man hurried past him, pulling along a lad by the
arm.

Now, this man was Gabriel, and as they turned
the corner of the road, and Mr. Maggs appeared in
his professional costume, both of them were some-
what astonished to hear the lad who was with
Gabriel call out—"Father! Father! I'm a kidnapped,
and will be murdered to-night. Help, Father, for
mercy's sake."

I will even venture to say that when M
Maggs heard this singular appeal he was not o
astonished, but startled—nay, even electrified. W
two strides he was in front of Gabriel, and
lad who was struggling to free himself from
grasp.

"Sam! is that you?" he said. "Or do m
deceive my 'art? Sam, is it you, or isn't it?
"It's me, Father!" gurgled Sam, whose
was being twisted uncomfortably tight by
"It won't be me much longer though, Fathe
dying——"

"Hands off!" shouted Mr. Maggs to
"Loose the boy! He's my son!"

"Go your ways," said Gabriel. "I
very well. Go your ways."

"Hit him, Father," murmured Sam
"Hit him, or I'm gone."

"Will you loose the lad?" roared Mr. Maggs.

"No, I won't," answered Gabriel.

"Then this shall," said Mr. Maggs; and as he spoke, down came the bundle of brass-bound rods on Gabriel's head, with force and weight enough to fell an ox. Poor Gabriel! that was the second time his person had suffered grievous injury from Tommy's friends.

When Gabriel fell stunned, Mr. Maggs placed Sam on his legs, and loosened his neckcloth. "Be you hurt, Sam?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Sam. "Here in the windpipe, Father."

"Rub him, then, Sam," said Mr. Maggs.

Sam did rub him, and declared he felt much better for it. Then Mr. Maggs shouldered his rods again and was about to set off, when Sam looked from Gabriel to his father, as though undecided whether he should leave his fallen enemy or not.

"Father," he said at last, "just lend me the top joint of the machine, with the brush on it."

"What for, Sam?" his father inquired.

"Because I'm in debt, Father, and should like to clear scores," said Sam. "I'll not shove it down far."

"Down where, Sam?" asked Mr. Maggs, with astonishment.

"Down his throat, Father," replied Sam; "only a little way, you know."

"No, Sam," replied Mr. Maggs, sternly, "certain'y not. That brush is a new one, and hasn't been up a dozen flues yet, and I'm not going to have

him dirtied by being pushed down that rogue's throat. Why, Sam, a man as'll kidnap a child would foul the worst and sootiest brush ever I see."

"But, Father!" persisted Sam, "short reckonings make long friends. See, he's coming too. What do you say to a run punce?"

"Well, Sam, indeed, I hardly know what to think," replied Mr. Maggs, with an air of abstraction. "You see there's a good deal to be said for and against. I shouldn't like for you to have anything on your mind, by no means. You havn't got on your best boots, have you?"

"No, Father, only clogs," said Sam.

"Well then, Sam, as he's getting sensible, and'll feel your kindness, you may just give him one—only one, mind, Sam."

Sam did give him one. Gabriel, who was getting over the effect of Mr. Maggs's blow, suddenly felt as though a thunderbolt had caught him on the back of his head, and all the sparks had flown into his eyes. The time of that occurrence was half-past seven; and though this may seem a paradox, yet, when Gabriel opened his eyes at eight o'clock, and began to rub his skull, he found that his bump of amativeness had become considerably developed.

Subsequently, in his interview with Madam Zulmann, Gabriel, after relating his failure, declined to make any further attempt on Tommy's person. Madam Zulmann did not press him to further measures. They both saw the lad was in the hands of determined, though humble friends, who would make any further attempt on their part extremely hazardous. And it may also have occurred to

them, for they were of a peculiarly superstitious race, that fate was against them.

Mr. Maggs's indignation was great at the attempt to carry off his son and heir, but it was as nothing compared to that of his wife. For such a crime as an attempt to abduct and appropriate her Sam, hanging was a punishment exceedingly lenient. She declared she would have liked to have seen the woman; she would have let her know who Sam's mother was, and if she should meet her that day fifty years she would put her mark on her.

These remarks were made in the evening, while they were engaged in discussing a savoury supper of tripe and onions. Mr. Maggs and his wife had been stirring up each other's wrath by the most violent speeches, and denunciations of those who had made the attempt on Sam's liberty, and by imagining all sorts of horrors that might have taken place, had not Mr. Maggs fortunately appeared upon the scene.

"They might have killed him," said Mrs. Maggs, beginning to weep from the combined effects of her emotion, and the onion peelings which lay on the table. "O Sammy, my precious boy," she continued, throwing her arms about Sam's neck, "I'm sure they meant to murder you."

Now Sam was very hungry, and moreover he had a strong partiality for tripe; and these sudden outbursts on his mother's part rather interfered with the proper and legitimate use of his knife and fork. He had submitted to her embraces for some time with a spirit of self-sacrifice truly heroic. But at

length his patience gave way, and on Mrs. Maggs informing him for the twentieth time that he would have been murdered, he said, or rather mumbled—for his mouth was full, and when hungry Sam sometimes forgot those little social observances termed "manners" by the class of which he was so distinguished an ornament—"Stuff!"

"Stuff!" repeated Mr. Maggs, while his wife put down the knife with which she had been conveying the gravy to her mouth; "Stuff, Sam! what do you mean? By G— I mean, hang it all! if I hadn't come by and give him a taste of my machine, you might have been made into stuffin'—yes, Sam, stuffin' for sassingers. Them sort of cattle are not over particular what they make sassage meat of."

"That's all stuff, Father," said Sam. "They did'nt think 'twas me."

"It's you that's talking stuff," replied Mrs. Maggs. "If the wagabones didn't think you was you, who do you think they *did* think you was?

This question, or rather the form in which it was put, might have puzzled most people; and I here respectfully call the attention of the Civil Service Commissioners to it, and submit that it be put in their next paper for a competitive examination in English literature. Sam, however, immediately grasped the meaning intended to be conveyed, and answered that it was his own particular opinion it was a case of mistaken identity; in fact, that he had been mistaken for Tommy.

"Why, what on earth put that in your head?" asked Mrs. Maggs, not over pleased that even

Tommy should supplant her Sam in the place of the hero of this little drama.

"Why, because she called me Tommy when she boxed my ears, and said I was her boy," replied Sam. "And besides that, you know as how Tommy has been took once before."

Mr. Maggs laid down his knife and fork, gazed solemnly at Tommy for a moment, and then turning to his wife said, "Mother, Sam speaks true. You know what our opinion about Tommy is! I'm certain now that there opinion is correct, and that chap as I knocked on the head thought he had hold of Tommy."

"I'm sure he did," said Sam. "He said as how I knowed him, and I'm sure I never see him in my life before."

During this conversation Tommy remained silent. His memory carried him back to the night of his being taken away from the Manor House at Orleton, and was struggling with Time for the mastery. The images conjured up were very faint, except on one point. He recollected that he had been carried away from a comfortable home in the night. That was vague enough, it is true. But he also recollected that the man who had carried him away had a scar from his eyebrow to his cheek bone, and that he had worn earrings. The recollection of that was perfect. It is a singular thing what strange pranks our minds lead us, for we often totally forget really important things that have occurred to us at no distant date, and retain the most perfect recollection of a trivial occurrence of our earliest years. This is a theory a great many very clever people are

inclined to cavil at; but the present writer can vouch for its correctness, inasmuch as he himself has sometimes totally forgotten promises he has made relating to pecuniary matters, while to this day he retains the most vivid recollection of a circumstance in which he was somewhat interested in his earlier days, and of having roared most lustily on being denied for the first time the maternal font.

It therefore occurred to Tommy that it was quite possible that Sam had been mistaken for him, and he consequently felt sick at heart, and became for a moment very pale. The thought was most alarming, and all the horrors of the Workhouse and his flight rushed upon his mind. So great was its effect, that tripe ceased to have charms for him, although he had scarcely started fairly. With staring eyes he glanced uneasily around the room, and then looking at Sam he said in a trembling voice, "Had he a scar across his cheek, and did he wear earrings, Sam?"

It was Sam's turn to be astonished then, and to drop *his* knife and fork. He stared at Tommy for a minute, while he swallowed the contents of his mouth, and then said, "By Gor, Tommy, yes he had."

"Oh, Mr. Maggs!" said Tommy, wringing his hands in terror, and crying bitterly, "Oh, Mr. Maggs, it's him! Oh, don't let him carry me away again! Oh, please let me stay here with you, or I shall die." And he threw himself on his knees before them, the very personification of terror and despair.

Mr. Maggs was not the man we believe him to

be, had he listened to this prayer unmoved. That bandy-legged little man had an exceedingly big and tender heart, and a dauntless courage. A tale of sorrow, or an appeal from the distressed, would bring the tears to his eyes in a moment. It was no wonder, then, that the sight of Tommy throwing himself on his protection, and appealing to his chivalrous nature—for chivalry, my dear Sir, is not confined to any particular class, and is quite as likely to be found under a sooty smock as beneath the robes of a peer—should have moved his heart to pity, and induced him to register a vow in heaven that he would stand by that lad in fortune or misfortune, so help him God. So he dashed his rough hand just once across his eyes, which were rather dim, gave a husky cough, as though something were in his throat, and looking exceedingly fierce, sprang immediately on his feet, and, grasping the poker, said, "Tommy, my lad, I'm a little 'un, but I'm game. I'll turn my back on no man, friend or enemy; and as to that feller, I'll settle him altogether if ever I see his ugly face again."

While Mr. Maggs was thus expressing his intention of protecting Tommy, his wife had taken the lad to her capacious and motherly bosom, and joining her sobs with his, was endeavouring to comfort him; and Sam, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles, was roaring for his clogs, and upbraiding himself for having let Gabriel off with only *one* run punce.

"Dear heart! we'll stand by you, and see you get your rights," sobbed Mrs. Maggs; "won't we, Samwel?"

"Eh! that we will," replied Mr. Maggs, glaring at his wife. We'll put him right, lass, if we spend a hundred pun' on it."

"I was always sure he was a gentleman," said Mrs. Maggs. "Didn't I tell you you would see I was right some day."

"Yes, you did," answered her husband. "You cheer up, Tommy," he continued. "We'll see you put to rights. Me, and the Missus, and Sam, will stand by you like brothers all."

So Mr. Maggs and his family settled it all between them that Tommy was a gentleman by birth, and that there was a conspiracy among certain evil-minded persons to keep him out of his rights; and though they could only surmise what those rights were, yet they were not the less real to them. He was an injured personage, and it was the mission of the Maggs family to see that he had his own again.

It was therefore decided that as it would probably be dangerous for Tommy to leave Hulme Terrace at any time alone, for fear of another attempt to take him away, he was never, on any pretext whatever, to leave those classic precincts unless in the company of Mr. Maggs or his wife.

"You'll do very well on the pavement, Tommy," Mr. Maggs informed him. "It isn't often I shall want you perfessionally, and when I do, you'll have a man by you with a bundle of heavy rods on his shoulder, as *will* stand by you. All you've got to do, is to keep quiet here; and God A'mighty won't let them willains succeed! No! not He! for not even a sparrow falleth to the ground but because

He lets him. Am I right in that quotation, Mother, or am I not?"

"You are right, Samwel! and He that said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' isn't a going to see this one put upon," replied Mrs. Maggs.

"Wery well, then," said Mr. Maggs. "You stick to the terrace, Tommy, and attend reg'lar to your lessons as Mr. Drust is giving you, and you'll be as good at books as if you went to school. How far are you on now, Tommy? You've been at it about a year and a half now."

"I'm learning Latin now, Tommy replied. "We are reading Virgil's 'Georgics.'"

"What's them?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"Poetry," Tommy replied.

"Well, I never!" said Mr. Maggs. "Can you read them right off, without spelling, Tommy?"

"Yes, I think," Tommy answered. "At least, the first few of them."

"Would you mind reading one of them there?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"If you like, I will," said Tommy, taking up his book.

Mr. Maggs took his pipe from his mouth, and looked at his wife with a look that said as plainly as any words, "Now listen! you will hear something that will astonish you."

Tommy then read one of Virgil's poems, compared with which the rosiest of Mr. Swinburn's effusions may be termed modest, while Mr. and Mrs. Maggs and Sam listened with unbounded delight, though they understood not a word.

"Beautiful!" said Mr. Maggs, when Tommy had finished. "I like that there poetry. You shall read us one of them there every night, Tommy. Mind you stick to Mr. Drust. I wonder whether he would let our Sam drop in with you of an evening? Oh, what a glorious thing is edication!"

CHAPTER XV.

After the events related in the last chapter had taken place, Tommy never left Hulme Terrace unless under the escort of Mr. Maggs or his wife. Under other circumstances, this would probably have been extremely irksome to him; but the great dread he had of being taken away from his kind protectors, fully counterbalanced any charms the bustle and noise of the streets might have had for him. Nearly the whole of his time was now spent in Mr. Drust's library. At first his reading was entirely without direction or system. Romances, novels, or history, were eagerly pored over with all the freshness of a newborn love. At length, however, Mr. Drust suggested to Tommy that he should commence some regular studies. To this Tommy at once agreed. Under the old gentleman's guidance, he worked hard at the dead languages, of which his tutor was a most accomplished master, and also at English literature. In this latter study, Madame Zulmann's daughter, Marion, joined him. As it has before been stated, she was intended for the stage, and, consequently, Shakespeare was her favourite author. In the meantime, Tommy had asked permission of Mr. Drust to bring Sam with him occasionally.

"What sort of a young gentleman is your friend?" inquired Mr. Drust.

"One of the best lads in the world, Sir," Tommy had assured him. "And *so* clever."

"Oh! very clever, is he?" said the gentleman. "Then, perhaps, I may call and see his father."

This Mr. Drust did; and to the unspeakable delight of Mr. Maggs and his wife, Sam was invited to spend as much time in the old gentleman's library as he could possibly spare.

Now, Sam, it must be confessed, had no ambition to become acquainted with Virgil, or any other of the Ancients. He informed his father that he did not care about that poet; that as long as Tommy read his poetry to them in the evenings, one Latin scholar was quite enough in the family. What *he* liked, was to read tales of knight-errantry. He also had a very decided taste for the legitimate drama; and when he could persuade his father to take him to the gallery of the Queen's Theatre to see Mr. Egan in "As You Like It," he was delighted.

"You can read Shakespeare, you know, Sam, with Marion and me," Tommy informed him as an inducement. "We read his works aloud before Mr. Drust, and he teaches us to read properly."

"I don't care about Shakespeare," Sam answered. "Who is he, Tommy?"

"Why, don't you know Shakespeare wrote plays?" asked Tommy.

"What! them plays as they act at the Queen's?" said Sam. "Did that chap write them as Mr. Egan comes on in?"

"Yes! and a great many more besides," Tommy replied.

"And did he write 'A fool, a fool! I met in the forest'?" asked Sam.

"Yes," Tommy answered. "Jaques says that in 'As You Like It.'"

"Then I'll come," said Sam. "Tell Mr. Drust as I shall be wery happy to make his acquaintance."

So it was arranged that Sam should accompany Tommy as often as possible to the old gentleman's library, and if he would do nothing else, he might learn to read Shakespeare. The first afternoon they went together, Sam had been scrubbed and brushed until, as his mother said, he was as clean and bright as a new penny. When they entered the room together, no one was there but Marion. She was growing into a beautiful but somewhat imperious girl at this time, much addicted to ordering Tommy about, and even Mr. Drust, and also to seeing that her orders were obeyed. But the two young folks got on very well together for all that. When they entered the room, then, Marion was busily employed, not in pursuing her proper studies, but in reading the adventures of that queen of sharp ones, Mistress Becky. By-the-by, what a number of Beckies there are in the world. We meet them at every turn in life. Indeed, some of us need not look out of our own family circles for them. However, Marion had got on in the history of this particular Becky to where, on the eve of Waterloo, Rawdon Crawley gives her his jewellery, gems, dressing-case, furs, and other costly articles which he had obtained on credit, regretting he

had not taken more from the London tradesmen, who had pressed him sorely, and whom he had refused, though much against that gallant soldier's feelings and usual practice. Marion was so much absorbed in the story that she did not see the boys enter, nor hear Sam apostrophise his eye, and declare "she was a perfect stunner, and no mistake."

"Miss Zulmann," said Tommy, "here is my friend Sam, our new pupil."

Marion looked up, and, seeing Sam, opened her eyes very wide, and pursed up her beautiful little mouth, as she said "Oh!" and then she burst into a laugh.

"This is the boy who goes ——"

"Up chimblies, Miss," said Sam, interrupting her.

"You must not say chimblies, but chimneys!" said Marion.

"Wery well! I won't then, Miss," replied Sam.

"You must say *very*, not *wery!*" said Marion.

"Certain'y, Miss," replied Sam. "I'll say anything to please you."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, laughing again; "you will persist in pronouncing your words wrong. We shall have a lot to do to teach you correct pronunciation, sha'n't we, Tom? Well, sir!"

"Sam, if you please, miss!" interrupted that young gentleman.

"Well, then, Sam! You must not mind my laughing when you came in, for you are such a funny-looking boy," said Marion.

"Certain'y not, miss," replied Sam.

"Your face is so laughable, and your eyes—indeed, sir ——"

"Sam, miss!" interrupted Sam.

"I beg your pardon," laughed Marion. "In fact, Sam, you are *so* droll."

"What's that, miss?" asked Sam.

"Miss Zulmann means your face is so full of fun that you make her laugh when she looks at you," Tommy said.

"Yes, that is it, Tom. Doesn't he make you laugh? I think he would be splendid in low comedy."

"Excuse me again, miss!" said Sam. "I'm wery—I mean very—troublesome, I know; but as I'm come to school, I may as well learn all I can. What's codemy?"

"Comedy!" replied Marion, laughing. "Comedy is the funny part in the plays at the theatre."

"Oh!" said Sam. "The chap as does the mustard-pot business, and pulls faces to make the gallery laugh."

Marion nodded.

"Then excuse me again, miss, if I don't agree with you. *My* game is 'igh hart, as I heard a gentleman say, one night, at the Queen's."

"Oh!" said Marion, opening her magnificent eyes to their fullest extent; "you go in for high art, do you, Sam? Let us hear what high art is."

"Well, it's where the chap comes on the stage and tells you of the seven ages of people," replied Sam. "That's 'igh hart, for I heard a gentleman say so."

"You mean the part where Jaques comes on," said Marion.

"Certain'y," replied Sam. "It must be Jaques,

for 'twas the same feller as said he met a fool in the forest, and Tommy says his name was Jaques."

"Well, I will turn to the passage," said Marion. "Can you recollect the words?"

"Eh! that can I!" replied Sam, as the colour mounted to his cheek, and his eyes flashed. "That can I, miss, and a good deal more than that." And he immediately commenced to recite the Seven Ages of Man:—

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players."

At first, Marion and Tom were inclined to laugh at Sam; but by the time he had finished the first line, he had gained their respectful attention. Tommy sat regarding his friend with the utmost astonishment, while Marion followed him word for word, her face lit up with pleasure, and her eyes shining with enthusiasm. The lad gave the piece in a really wonderful manner, having caught the action and intonation of one of our greatest actors, whom he had listened to, night after night, at the Queen's Theatre, unknown to his parents. When he had finished, Marion went over to him, took his hand in hers, and looking into his eyes until he dropped them, said, "Sam, this *is* high art! Where did you learn your elocution? This is wonderful!"

As she said this, a hand was laid on her head, and another on Sam's shoulder, and, looking up, they saw the luminous eye of Mr. Drust beaming on them.

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Miss Zulmann," he

said. "In recognising our young friend's merits as a reader, you only do yourself justice, for it proves to me that you are beginning to really understand the immortal bard. It *is* art! and art of no common kind. That very passage has often been rendered before a select audience on the London boards in a manner not superior to what we have been listening to. I had the good fortune to enter the room, although you failed to see me, just as he began."

At this praise Sam trembled, and had he not held on to the table, he thought he should have fallen. He had never attempted anything of the kind before an audience before, and the praise bestowed on him was sweet and bewildering. He very soon, however, regained his composure, and informed Mr. Drust of the manner in which he had become acquainted with Shakespeare.

"We must have you in our readings, sir," said the old gentleman, rubbing his hands. "Mustn't we, Thomas? What do you say, Marion? He will be our star when we get him advanced far enough to read without stumbling."

"Do you know," he continued, turning to Sam, "that this young lady is a dramatic student?"

"That is, she will be in the play some day, I believe, sir," said Sam.

"Yes," replied the old gentleman. "You shall hear her presently read 'Give me the daggers!'"

"No, sir," said Sam, interrupting him. "Them's the words right enough, but this is the way she said 'em." And in a moment Sam's face expressed scorn and determination as he repeated the lines:—

"Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures."

"Good! very good!" said the old gentleman. "I think in time, Mr. Sam, we shall make something of you. Now we will have our books down, and read one of the plays. What shall it be, Marion? We give you the choice, as it is only right to do."

"Can you read a part of a play, Sam?" asked Marion.

"I don't know, miss," Sam replied. "If it is one I never saw at the Queen's, I'm afraid I should have to spell the hard words."

"But you could manage to get on fairly, I suppose, if your memory were called into action?" said the old gentleman.

"I might manage it, sir, if it was one of them I've seen," replied Sam. "I can recollect the one where Lady Macbeth says 'Give me the daggers!'"

"You must have a wonderful memory!" said Mr. Drust, turning his single eye on Sam.

"Pretty good, sir," Sam answered. "You see I never had the chance to read much, and so I took to remembering what I heard."

"A most excellent plan," said Mr. Drust. "You have made your natural ability supply the place of education. Now then, Marion, have you decided on the play we shall read?"

"We had better try 'Macbeth,'" Marion answered. "And perhaps Sam will aid us with his experience of the Queen's Theatre."

When they had found the play, Sam had the greatest difficulty in keeping pace with the others.

The type was small, and most of the words required spelling, except in those passages which he had committed to memory. Those, however, he gave with a dramatic force such as Tommy or Marion had no pretensions to. He appeared to grasp the spirit of the passage, and throw himself into it, like a born actor.

Mr. Drust was astonished and delighted. He had a strong love for the drama, and had in his youth earned laurels on the boards as an amateur. His delight culminated to a point, however, when they came to the passage in which Macbeth sees the ghost, in the fourth scene of the third act. It was Tommy's turn to read the passage where the murderer addresses the ghost :—

"Avaunt! and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!"

He read it pretty much as nine boys out of ten would have done. There was no more force or passion in his delivery than if he had been reading a quotation from the stock and share list.

"I'm afraid you will never make a first-class reader, Thomas," he said. "Your reading is too matter-of-fact. Can you not imagine Macbeth's horror when he thinks he sees the ghost—that of itself would terrify him, for the scene is supposed to occur in a superstitious age, when everyone believed in ghosts, witchcraft, warlocks, and goblins. Add to the terror which accompanies superstition, the workings of a guilty conscience, and you may form some idea of the terrible state of mind in which the Scottish king must have been at the

moment he spoke those words. If you read on to that which follows Lady Macbeth's apology to the peers for her husband's disorder, you may probably form a clearer idea of this. Now try again."

Tommy did try again, but failed to realise the terrible scene almost as lamentably as before. It was evidently of no use to expect him to do justice to the lines. So Mr. Drust asked Sam whether he could recollect them.

Sam thought he could.

"Well, then, will you be good enough to read both passages?" the old gentleman said. "And above all things endeavour to realise Macbeth's position—his terror, and the upbraidings of his conscience."

Sam repeated the passages as requested, the old gentleman watching him over his spectacles, and quietly beating the measure with the tips of his fingers on the table. He nodded his head approvingly, and appeared perfectly satisfied with the performance until Sam repeated the words—

"Take any shape but *that*."

"Stop!" said the old gentleman. "Not another word to-day. A finer rendering of that passage, both for action and intonation, I never listened to. We will put up our books. I have discovered a genius, and, by God's help, his talent must be developed." And the old gentleman took off his spectacles, wiped them, and put them in his pocket.

"You must come on the stage," whispered Marion to Sam. "We will make our *début* in the same piece, won't we?"

Sam blushed to the roots of his hair. He glanced shyly at the beautiful girl, and thought he could ask no greater happiness than to appear in her company before a full house and hear their deafening applause. Give him five minutes of such ecstacy, and he would willingly die. At that moment two passions sprung into life in his breast. Two passions that in most cases are antagonistic—love and ambition. Such a vision of beauty he had never, even in his dreams, seen as the lovely young girl, her face glowing with admiration and her eyes with enthusiasm. Never, even in his wildest flights of fancy, had he heard such praise, or had opened to him the gates of such a glorious future. The next moment his wings failed him, and he came back to this work-a-day world again. "You forget, miss," he said, "I am only a sweep."

"That does not matter," replied Marion. "Some of the greatest actors have begun from quite as low a position. The master of the class I attend has said so hundreds of times, and the example of those great ones in our profession, he says, should encourage us, his pupils, to persevere."

"Well said! Genius is above all accidents of birth," observed the old gentleman. "The thought of your present position must not daunt you, Sam. We were reading the story of a celebrated painter the other evening, who, from being a slave, rose by the sheer power of genius to be one of the greatest men his profession has ever seen."

"But what will father say?" said Sam.

"I will call on your father this evening," replied the old gentleman. "You must and shall have a

chance of developing those abilities which nature has granted you."

That evening Mr. and Mrs. Maggs were considerably surprised to receive a visit from Mr. Drust. From Tommy's report of his learning they had come to regard him as one of the most wonderful of men, and always spoke of the number of books he possessed with considerable awe. Their delight was very great when their Sam was invited to visit the old gentleman's library; but what pen can describe their sensations of pride when they heard from Mr. Drust's own lips that their son was a genius. They were speechless with astonishment, and knew not what to say, until Mrs. Maggs, in a moment of inspiration, flung her arms around Sam's neck, and sobbed out, "Oh, dear! aint I happy! My Sam is a genius." It was then that Mr. Maggs discovered his powers of speech. He pulled his shirt collar up, and his wristbands down, and looking at his wife, said, "Go it, mother! go it old girl! Our boy—yours and mine, missus—is a reg'lar genus, and we have Mr. Drust's own word for that 'ere. Am I right, sir, or am I not?" he continued, turning to his visitor.

"Perfectly right, Mr. Maggs," replied the old gentleman.

"A reg'lar genus, sir! not a half-bred 'un?" asked Mr. Maggs.

The old gentleman took a pinch of snuff, whisked his handkerchief over his shirt front, and nodded.

"Wery well, then," said Mr. Maggs. "If I'm the father of a genus, I'm a happy man. It's all come of that Book o' Martyrs! Sam! Sam! my genus,

up no more chimblies you'll go! 'Taint correct for a genus to go a-sweeping chimblies any more."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Drust. "I came here on purpose to induce you to give the boy a chance, and if he does not become not only a credit to you, but to all Manchester, I shall be very much disappointed."

"Is a genus a good business, sir?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

The old gentleman smiled and took snuff. "Sometimes," he answered. "When well directed, it's a great blessing. When prostituted, it's just the reverse."

"How much will it cost to set him up as a reg'lar hand at it?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"We'll inquire about all that," replied Mr. Drust, smiling. "At present I would advise you to allow him to come to me every day with our friend Thomas, until he is a little more advanced as a scholar, you know. In due time it will be necessary to place him under a better teacher than myself, and, of course, you will have to pay for it."

"I don't mind that," said Mr. Maggs, slapping his breeches pocket. "I haven't swept all the best chimblies of Salford, to say nothing o' 'igher Broughton, this last twenty year, without having summut in the bank. Or, if it's only a hundred or so, why the missus can fetch 'em down from under the mattress this minute."

"Not at all necessary at present," replied Mr. Drust, who seemed endeavouring not to laugh. "In a year or so, it is probable Mr. Sam may want your help in that way, but until he leaves me for a

more accomplished teacher, you had better bank that hundred or so you have upstairs. Can I offer you snuff?"

"Thank you, sir. I takes mine in the shape of tobaccer," replied Mr. Maggs.

"Then I may consider it settled that you will give your son every opportunity to develop his abilities," said Mr. Drust, rising to leave.

"Certain'y, sir," replied Mr. Maggs, accompanying the old gentleman to the door. "Most certain'y, sir. We've got a genus in the family, and we mean to stick to him."

"Your determination does you honour," said the old gentleman. "Good night, Mr. Maggs."

"Good night, sir," replied Mr. Maggs. Then taking two steps from his door, he overtook Mr. Drust, and after having coughed, he nudged him with his elbow, and said, "Mr. Drust! I say!"

"What is it, Mr. Maggs?" inquired the old gentleman, looking at Mr. Maggs with an amused expression on his face.

"You're sure our Sam is a reg'lar out-an'-outer?"

"Quite!" replied the old gentleman.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Maggs. He then looked around him with an air of mystery, and coming closer to the old gentleman, he applied his hand to his mouth as a sort of speaking-trumpet, and whispered, "About them notes upstairs. There's twenty-one fivers, sir. Would you mind taking care on 'em for a few years? or if not all of them, say ten or a dozen? I should take it kindly of you, sir, and you to find out as Sam was a genus."

"No! no! for heaven's sake!" laughed the old

gentleman. "I should never sleep if I had so much money. You are a good fellow, Mr. Maggs, and I thank you."

Mr. Maggs appeared for a moment dejected, and said, apologetically, "No offence, sir, I hope?"

"None whatever," replied the old gentleman.

"And you're sure he's a reg'lar out-and-outer, sir. Our Sam, I mean," said Mr. Maggs.

"Quite!" replied the old gentleman.

"Then, sir, both Sam and me will always be much beholden to you, for hang me if ever I knew he was a genus," said Mr. Maggs. And it may be remarked here that a good many fathers are and always will be in the same predicament.

CHAPTER XVI.

Madam Zulmann did not often visit her daughter, it must be confessed. She generally appeared twice a year—once at midsummer, and again at Christmas. Whether these rare visits, when they did occur, implied affection or business is uncertain. One thing, however, we do know, and that is, that after she had made her appearance in Hulme Terrace, money seemed more plentiful with Mr. Drust than it had been for some time previous, and that old gentleman and his wife usually gave a little supper, to which were invited Mr. and Mrs. Maggs, and Sam and Tommy. On these, and all other occasions when the young people met, Marion, as has been already intimated, usually led the two lads a hard life of it. Sometimes she was gracious in the extreme to them, and at others just the reverse. She mostly showed her imperious temper, however, to Tommy, with whom she would sulk for half a day together, after which she would be excessively miserable until she had made it up with him, which process was oftentimes of the most extraordinary nature.

It was just after one of these little scenes that Mr. Drust entered his library one evening. Tommy

was at work with his crucibles testing some specimens of metals, and apparently paying no attention whatever to Marion, who was standing in the centre of the room in a state which would have justified anyone in saying she was a bit of a brimstone.

Her hair, wonderful in its abundance, had escaped from its confinement at the back of her beautifully shaped head, and hung in a rather disordered state about her, while her eyes were full of tears, and were flushed with anger.

"You never pay the least attention to anything I say!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"I do, when you are not in a rage," Tommy answered. "I think when you get in such a passion, it is much better I should take no notice."

"Isn't it enough to make me get in a passion?" said Marion. "You treat me like a child, and put me off with promises."

"Well! you are not very old, you know," replied Tommy, smiling. "Now if you'll only keep quiet for half an hour I shall have finished here, and the Park does not close for another two hours. There will be lots of time."

"I am sixteen, sir, and you are but a year older," she said. "And a woman of sixteen is quite as old as a man of twenty. And I won't go out with you any more."

"*I'll* go with you this minute," said Sam, who was trying to fix his mind on the book before him, but could not.

"I don't want you," replied Marion, stamping with her foot. "If I want to go, I can go alone."

"Try to be reasonable, Marion!" said Tommy. "You know I didn't promise to go with you until five o'clock, and it is only four now. Besides, if you wish to go earlier, Sam has offered to go with you. A nice way you have of thanking him, I must say."

"I don't care!" said Marion. "If I said five o'clock, you know you ought to be ready at four!"

"Well! well! my good girl, there's Sam, who is always willing to be ordered about by you," Tom replied. "Now, there's no necessity to throw the books about. Shakespeare surely cannot have offended you."

"I don't want either of you," she exclaimed. "I won't go out with either of you again. There are plenty who would only be too glad to have the opportunity of taking me out. But everything and everybody must give way to your nasty bottles, and stones and things."

This was a rather cruel speech of Marion's, especially to Sam, who had waited on her, run her errands, and been bullied by her with all the patience of a Spartan. He just glanced at her, and the colour mounted to his cheek, and his brow came down over his eyes, but he said nothing in reply. Tom, however, whose feelings towards the beautiful little tyrant were probably of a different nature to Sam's, was not disposed to put up with it. He put down the bottle he was holding, and, to use Marion's own words, gave it her right well.

"I don't care," he said, "what you say to *me*, because you know you generally get as good as you bring. It is not my nature, Marion, to be bullied by

anybody; and besides, it does *you* no good for your friends to put up with it. But that you should pitch into old Sam there, who has been like a brother to you"—here Sam blushed, and dug his nails into the table—"is too bad. Why there is nothing he has not done for you. It's Sam do this, and Sam do that; and after all he gets no thanks. You ought to be ashamed, Marion."

"There! there! hear him!" said Marion, beginning to cry, which was about the best thing she could do. "Oh, you cruel boy, to say such a thing! I *am* thankful to Sam, and you know it! He's a hundred times better than you; and a better scholar too, for all your nasty bottles——"

"That's all stuff!" Sam observed.

"Oh, but you are, Sam; and I never meant to be unkind to you; and I'll shake hands with you this minute."

Sam took her hand in his, and a very pleasant light lit up his face, as he was carrying it, shyly enough, to his lips. He thought all his trouble well paid by these few words from the petulant little lady; but before he could imprint the kiss which he had intended slyly doing, she snatched her hand away, and said, "Thank you, Sam! not *that*, if you please. I'm quite willing to shake hands with you, but when I want you to kiss it, I'll let you know."

"I'm very sorry," replied Sam, looking rather foolish. "I—I didn't mean to do it."

"I'm glad you did not," said Marion. "Though it shows you are a good deal politer than some others I could name."

"Because I haven't tried to kiss your hand,"

laughed Tom, who had now regained his good temper, and was working away again among his bottles and ores.

"I never asked you to, did I?" sobbed Marion. "I'd like to see you do it! I hate you."

"Oh, Marion!" Sam exclaimed.

"I do hate him!" she said, stamping with her foot. "I hate myself. I hate everybody. I wish I was dead, I do!"

"Marion," said Tom, gravely, "you should not go on like this. You grieve both Sam and me very much. You know I will do anything in reason to please you, and Sam will do anything out of reason. It is unkind of you."

"You are always talking of reason," sobbed Marion. "Sa—Sam don't talk of reason. He's much kinder than you—and cleverer."

"I know that," replied Tom. "Sam will be a great man some day; and when you and he appear together in 'Romeo and Juliet,' and bring down the house in enthusiastic applause, I shall be roaring out my plaudits from a sixpenny seat in the gallery."

"He can read better than you; you can't read at all!" she wept.

"Marion," said Sam, taking her hand, "do sit down and compose yourself. You know what you are saying is nonsense."

"It's nothing of the kind, sir!" she replied, firing up at the unfortunate lad. "You think you can say anything you like to me, but you can't read a bit better than him! Sit down yourself! I won't have anything to say to you." And the

spoiled little beauty made a rush towards the door, in another shower of tears.

"Marion," said Tommy, stepping before her, "you must not go off in anger like this. Come back one moment, and I'll put away the confounded bottles, and we'll all go to the park together. Come!"

And he took her hand, and placed his arm round her waist to draw her to her seat. In a moment the colour rushed to her face and forehead, and she bent her head to hide her blush until it almost rested on Tom's shoulder. The lad glanced towards Sam for a moment, and saw that he was pale as a sheet. He gave Tom a sickly smile, and cast his eyes on the book before him.

"Confound it!" thought Tom. "What *is* the matter with these two? I can't make it out."

"Here, Sam!" he said, "just comfort this little tyrant, and get her into a good humour, while I put away my things. I won't be a second."

In a moment she sprang from him, her eyes flashing daggers. "I will not go with you. I hate you; I can't bear you; and I'll go to my own room and won't see you any more!" she said, bending her body towards him, and clenching her little fists, and looking altogether like a little tigress.

The two lads looked at one another the moment she was gone. "What a little vixen she has become," said Tom, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't know what has come over her."

There was a strong conflict going on within Sam's breast all this time. When he saw Marion's head so near Tom's shoulder, he felt he hated his friend.

Then his better nature got the mastery, and he vowed he would tear the little tyrant from his heart. He felt he did love her—that he had loved her from the moment he had first seen her. But to see her place her head on his friend's breast, was death. He began to believe that she was not indifferent to Tom; and then that conflict began between friendship and jealousy. Those conflicts are fierce in young hearts; but then youth is the age of chivalry, unselfishness, and devotion. It is in youth the noblest sacrifices are made—when generous impulses are not checked.

Tom saw there was a struggle going on within Sam's heart. Though he had now arrived at that age at which the heart is most susceptible to the charms of female beauty (for I take it, a lad of from seventeen to twenty years of age falls in love oftener than at any other period of his life), he had had no experience of the tender passion. He now began, however, to fancy that his friend Sam was not so fortunate. The meek way in which the lad had taken Marion's bullying, the pleasure he seemed to experience in waiting on her, and the pain expressed on his pale face when he saw her head on Tom's shoulder, caused doubts to rise in the mind of the latter as to whether his friend had escaped from the blind little archer's shafts. So he went over to Sam, and putting his arm over his shoulder, said, "Sam, old boy, what's the matter? You haven't seemed like your old self lately."

Sam moistened his dry lips with his tongue, but did not speak.

"Now, old fellow, come! tell us all about it,"

continued Tom, looking on the other lad, and smiling. "Have you gone and fallen in love with the little vixen?"

Sam for one moment felt he should like to strangle his dearest friend; but looking up into his friend's eyes, he saw nothing but good humour and kindness in them. So instead of saying something bitter and hard, or committing a breach of the peace, he said, "That's just it. I'm a big fool, I know, for it's nothing but the sheerest folly at my age, and I ought to be well thrashed; but I can't help it, and that's the truth."

"Well, well," said Tom, looking at the other lad as though he were studying a problem, "it is strange, Sam. I never guessed it for a moment. And what a little Tartar she is, too!"

"I hope she'll not cause mischief between us two," Sam said.

"Good gracious, Sam, what do you mean?" replied Tom, opening his eyes to their widest extent. "What in the name of fortune should she cause mischief between you and me for? Why, old boy, you're bilious."

"Are you sure, Tom, you don't care for her?" asked Sam. "You see, I'm in for it strong. It is more like smallpox than measles with me, and I've got the disease very badly. Are you sure, now, you don't care for her?"

"Not a pin's head!" replied Tom, snapping his fingers. "I won't deny I'd do anything for her in reason, because I look on her almost like a little sister, you know; but in any other way, most decidedly not. Why, you see how she goes on at me,

the little spitfire. Besides that," added Tom, laughing, "I'm afraid I'm over young for matrimony, Sam. Fancy me at seventeen going a-courting! The thing is absurd, old boy; and I tell you, *you're* not over-wise yourself."

"If my *knowing* I'm a fool would make me wise, I should be no longer an ass," Sam replied.

"Ah, well!" said Tom, yawning, "I would get over it if I were you, Sam. Don't you put up with her nonsense any more. Give it her back again, and you'll be all right in no time." By which advice Tom showed himself extremely ignorant of human nature.

"I say, Sam!" he asked directly after, "have you got any tobacco?"

"Not a bit," Sam replied.

"Have you got any money, then?"

"Not a penny," said Sam.

"Well, neither have I," Tom sighed. "I thought a pipe would put you right. If it didn't soothe you, it might make you sick, perhaps; and in either case, old boy, you would forget all the nonsense you've got into your head. Hang it! why not smoke some brown paper?"

"I don't know," replied Sam; "paper is too hot. Hold on a minute, though. I fancy there is a little black tobacco inside the covers of Sheridan's plays, on the shelf. I recollect I put some there last week. Let us look."

"Here it is," said Tom. "Now have you got a pipe?"

"There's one on the top of the bookshelf, on the right-hand side of the window," Sam replied.

Tom got the pipe down—a short, dirty little instrument, smelling vilely of rank tobacco—and sitting down on a long stool in front of the fire, they proceeded to fill it, and pass it from one to the other, each taking a whiff or two, after the manner of the North American Indians. This went on for some time in silence. At length Tom said, "How do you feel, Sam?"

"All right," replied Sam, with an effort. "How do you feel?"

"Pretty much the same as you do," replied Tom.

They worked manfully away for a few moments longer, but the Limerick twist was becoming too much for them. They began to feel their heads spin round; a cold sweat ran down their backs; and a horrible sickness took possession of them.

"You look rather white, Sam," said Tom, in a whisper.

"So do you," replied Sam, in the same tone.

"I feel—very—poorly!" gasped Tom.

"So—do—I!" groaned Sam.

"I—I—shall lie down!" gasped Tom, who at once rolled off the stool on to the floor.

"An'—I'll put—my poor head on—the table!" said Sam, staggering to a chair. "Oh, dear! Oh, my!"

"Are you in love—with her now?" asked Tom, faintly.

"I hate her!" groaned Sam. "Oh, dear! I'm going to faint."

"So am I," moaned Tom. "She's a little vixen, isn't she?"

"A regular little devil!" gasped Sam. "Oh, dear! I'm gone!"

And gone he was, for at that moment his head seemed of such a weight, and his body so weak, especially about the legs, that he rolled off his seat on to the floor beside Tom, who, as his friend joined him on the bare boards, murmured, "A certain cure for love. Though why *I* tried it I don't know, as I never was in love. Oh, dear! this is horrible!"

While the two lads were in this state of tobacco sickness, the misery of which is only equalled by sea sickness, Mr. Drust entered the room.

"Why, Tom! why, Sam! what is the matter? Have you been drinking?" asked the old gentleman.

"No, sir," replied Sam, faintly. "We were feeling rather miserable, and tried some tobacco to cheer us up."

"Oh, indeed!" said the old gentleman. "Gad! I hope it has cured you!"

"Yes, sir," Tom answered. "It has cured one misery, but it has brought on another, and I don't know which is the worse. You had better ask Sam that."

"A counter-irritant," said the old gentleman, taking snuff. "Smoking at your age is not advisable, though. Now you had better both put your heads into a bucket of water, and come downstairs and speak to Madam Zulmann, who has come."

In the course of half an hour the lads descended to the little room below the library, both looking very pale, and considerably the worse for their attempt to cure the tender passion. Madam Zulmann and Marion were both there, the latter of

whom had quite recovered her composure, with the exception of a little shyness, the natural result of her outbreak.

"Mrs. Drust," said the old gentleman to his wife, "is the tea ready? These two young gentlemen, I think, will feel the benefit of a cup of Bohea. They have invented a cure for the horrors; but I am strongly inclined to think they found the cure almost as bad as the disease."

"The tea is quite ready, Ishmael," replied Mrs. Drust.

"Then let us sit down," said the old gentleman. "Madame Zulmann, if you will sit between our two young friends, you may possibly glean some valuable information from them as to their late experiments."

"I shall be only too glad to hear of the cure they have discovered," she replied, fixing her fine dark eyes on the lads. "Without going so far as to speak of the horrors, I think there are few persons who have a long experience of the world but would be glad to hear of a cure for care and trouble."

The only answer to this badinage was an indistinct murmur from Sam, that "the least said was the soonest mended."

While they sat at tea, Madam Zulmann watched the lads and her daughter with apparently much interest. Nothing escaped her. She was soon aware of a certain degree of interest in Marion, proclaimed by Sam's eyes, and also perceived a timidity in her daughter's manner towards Tom. As to the latter, he displayed no emotion beyond a bashfulness consequent on the presence of a stranger, which is

not at all uncommon in lads of his years, even when brought up in the society of ladies.

"You young gentlemen have altered a great deal since I had the pleasure of first meeting you here," she said, turning towards Tom. "I recollect perfectly the first day I saw you, Mr. Burton. You were a very little fellow, but then it is at least five years ago. I think you told me you had lost your parents in your infancy?"

Tommy recollected telling her nothing of the sort, but he answered, blushing very deeply as he did so, "I believe, ma'am, I had that misfortune. But my recollection of my infancy is very vague, and not to be relied on."

"There are some things we never forget, though," she said, speaking very slowly.

Tom glanced at her, and saw her eyes fixed on him. "I cannot speak from experience," he replied. "I have no doubt you are correct, though."

Now this was not quite truthful on Tom's part. There were certain circumstances in his life which he would never forget. He would never forget Gabriel's face; and he began to think he had seen Madam Zulmann, and heard her voice, somewhere else besides where she now sat. This fancy was momentary, though, and only flashed across him when he met her glance.

"I quite agree with you, madam," said Mr. Drust, fixing his solitary eye on his guest, and then on Sam. "There are certain circumstances in one's life, the recollection of which is never effaced."

"Do you think so?" she replied, glancing rather uneasily at Mr. Drust. "You are, perhaps, of opinion

then, that Mr. Burton did not quite comprehend my meaning."

"Not at all," said the old gentleman. "Believe me, Tom knows quite well what he is about. I was referring more particularly to our young friend, Mr. Maggs."

Madam Zulmann elevated her eyebrows as much as to say, "Indeed! is that all?"

"My dear, I'll trouble you for another cup of tea," said the old gentleman to his wife. Then turning again towards Sam, he continued, "I hope, Sam, you will have reason to treasure up the recollection of to-morrow for the whole of your life."

Sam turned pale and red by turns at this address. What could the old gentleman mean? he thought. Then a sudden flash of inspiration seized him. Suppose he had procured him an engagement! The thought was almost too delicious.

"Am I to appear——" he began, trembling and blushing as he spoke.

The old gentleman laughed quietly, and his single eye beamed like a star on Sam. "No! no!" he said, "at least, not before the public; and that is what you meant, I think. Oh, dear! how impatient youth is!"

"They will lose all that when they are our age, Mr. Drust," said Madam Zulmann. "Long years will then seem as nothing, providing they have an object in view—an ambition to realise, or a wrong to avenge."

"Pardon me," replied the old gentleman. "I trust that should they ever suffer wrong they will leave it in the hands of One who has said, 'Ven-

geance is mine; I will repay.' And as to your time of life, madam," continued the old gentleman with a smile, and a wave of his hand, "you are yet in your best years. It will be different with you when you are as old as Mrs. Drust or myself." And he smiled on his wife, and his eye beamed with an affection which defied time; and he patted the old lady's hand as it lay in her lap.

"No," he continued, looking at Sam. "You must curb your impatience, my boy. You have much to do before you appear in public. But to— morrow I trust will be your first step towards the consummation of your hopes. I have arranged with Mr. Somerset Danvers, of the Theatre Royal, who, by the by, is an old friend of mine, to hear you read one or two plays. And mind, Sam, you do your best. If he says you will succeed, I'll stake my life you will do so."

"Oh, sir," said Sam, "how can I thank you for being so good to me?"

The old gentleman took out his snuff-box, and quietly taking a pinch, said, "I'll tell you, Sam. Rea to-morrow as you never read before; and if ever y should become a great actor, tell them, when at y greatest height of fame, it was *I* who first taught y

"Sir!" said Sam, in whose eyes the tears st "next to my father, I owe you everything."

The following morning Hulme Terrace pre quite a festive and holiday appearance. As e seven o'clock Mr. Maggs was in his back the water turned on, and Sam and To rubbing away on the delighted little swee scrubbing-brush.

"Rub away, boys," said the little man. "I'm bound to shine to-day. Put a polish on, Sam. It's only correct the father of a genus should turn out well on the mornin' when that genus is going to astonish the London manager. And we *will* astonish him, too, won't we, Sam?"

"I hope so, father," replied Sam.

After being cleaned and rubbed until his rosy cheeks shone like a glass bottle, and been assured by both lads that "he would do," the little man arrayed himself in his best clothes, and when they sat down to breakfast he appeared in all the glory of his wedding suit, not even forgetting an enormous bunch of flowers, which Tom had fetched for him from Victoria Market, and which was fastened in his buttonhole.

When the time approached for their appearance at Mr. Drust's, Mr. Maggs said, "Now, mother, we must do it correct, you know. You take my arm, put the key of the door in your pocket, and Sam and Tom folly in the rear. Now then, march it is."

When they entered Mr. Drust's library, Mr. Somerset Danvers was already there, in all the glory of a blue-black wig with the most luxuriant curls, and a considerable amount of jewellery. Madam Zulmann and Marion were there also.

"This is Mr. Maggs, the father of our young friend," said Mr. Drust. "Mr. Maggs, this is the gentleman I have interested in your son."

"Your servant, sir," said Mr. Maggs, with a prodigious bow. "Me and Mrs. Maggs, as is the mother of our Sam, are much beholden to you, sir,

an' specially to you, Mr. Drust, as is a friend to our Sam, and no mistake."

Mr. Danvers looked at Mr. and Mrs. Maggs through his gold eyeglass, smiled and bowed, and then helped himself from Mr. Drust's snuff-box.

"Suppose we commence," he said to the old gentleman.

"At once, if you like," he replied. "Pray be seated, Mr. Maggs. Mrs. Maggs, allow me to offer you a chair."

"Thank you kindly, sir," replied Mr. Maggs. "Mother, I'll hold your flowers, and then you can see our Sam go through his lessons without anything to bother you."

Mrs. Maggs resigned her bouquet to her husband, for she also was furnished with one, and Sam opened his volume of Shakespeare.

"What play shall I read, sir," asked Sam, who was trembling and looking as pale as a ghost.

"Anything you like," smiled Mr. Danvers. "Shall we say a few extracts from 'Othello.'"

Sam commenced in a most miserable manner, and after stumbling through a page or so, completely broke down.

"Cheer up, Sam!" said Mr. Maggs, who was mopping his face with the tail of his coat. "Cheer up, matey! Never say die!"

"Nervous," Mr. Danvers remarked.

"I think so," replied the old gentleman. "He'll get over that presently."

Sam *was* suffering from extreme nervousness. He would not have minded reading before all the others in the least; but before a London manager,

in whose hands he believed his success or failure lay, was quite another thing. Sam could not go on, and at length sunk into a chair, while tears of mortification coursed each other down his pale and clammy cheeks.

"Sam! Sam! don't go for to cry!" said Mrs. Maggs, who was herself sobbing. "Don't 'ee cry, Sam! You'll show the gentleman what o'clock it is directly, I know."

"To be sure he will," said Mr. Maggs, who appeared quite as much agitated as his son. "Remember, Sam, you're a genus, my boy. Go in again and win, Sam, for the honour of the Maggses."

While this conversation was going on, Mr. Drust took the London manager to the window, in order that Sam might the more readily recover his composure. While conversing on indifferent topics, Tom, who was in a state of considerable excitement, joined them, and suggested that Marion should be asked to read the part of Desdemona. "It may keep him in countenance, sir," Tom said; "and I'm sure he only wants nerve to do it well."

"A very good idea," said the old gentleman. "I will ask her."

"Miss Zulmann, would you mind reading a part with Sam?" he asked.

"Not at all," Marion replied. "I am sure he only wants some one to join him, to read quite as well as he has ever done."

After a short time, Sam again began to read, and though considerably better than his first attempt, he still showed nervousness until he warmed to his

work. Presently the London manager began to regard him with attention. He made him read over certain passages, nodding his approval or pursing up his lips, as Sam displayed excellence or mediocrity. Marion's reading, he was pleased to bestow marked approval on. As Sam overcame his nervousness, however, affairs began to look brighter. Mr. Maggs ceased to fidget in his chair, and Mrs. Maggs ceased to weep. At length the lad seemed to lose sight entirely of his audience, and threw his whole soul into the play. His passion arrested the attention of everyone in the room except Madam Zulmann. She had seated herself by Tom, and while the others were absorbed in attention to Sam's really superb reading, she began in a low voice to talk to him.

"You do not recollect your parents?" she said.

"No," Tom replied. "I have a faint recollection of a lady, who, I believe was my mother, but it is very indistinct."

"Had you no other relatives?" she inquired, fixing her dark eyes on him.

"I fancy I must have had, but I can recollect nothing distinctly. It is very many years since I was taken away from my friends," he answered.

"Poor boy!" she said, though the tone of her voice contradicted the feeling her words implied. "Have you no recollection of how, or by whom, you were taken away?"

"None," replied Tom.

His companion questioned him no farther. She seemed lost in thought. Probably she was thinking that the boy's forgetfulness of his infancy was a

sure safeguard against his crossing her path. Perhaps she had some other thoughts in which both he and her daughter had a place. Her meditation, however, was interrupted by a loud burst of applause from Mr. Drust.

"Splendid, Sam!" the old gentleman exclaimed, taking prodigious quantities of snuff the while. "Splendid! don't you think so, Danvers?"

"Very good, indeed!" replied that gentleman. "I think that after say twelve months' study under a good master, this young gentleman might appear in public; and 'pon my honour, Drust, if the young lady were to make her *début* in the same piece, I would almost answer for their success."

"Brayvo, Sam!" exclaimed Mr. Maggs, when he heard this opinion. "I knowed you'd stand up for the honour of the Maggses, my boy. Mother," he continued, turning to his wife, "we knowed Sam would do the trick, didn't we? Oh, our Sam's a genus, and no mistake."

"I believe he is," said the London manager. "But before he can appear before the public, Mr. Maggs, some little expense will have to be incurred. Now—a—I don't mind standing to the expense of a year or two's study for him, on certain conditions."

"You are wery kind, sir," replied Mr. Maggs. "What's them conditions?"

"Well—a—I'll put him under a first-class master, and allow him a hundred a year, until he comes out. In consideration of this risk—and, my dear sir, you must grant there's a good deal of risk in it, for the public may not think so favourably of

your son as I do—he shall agree to put himself entirely in my hands for five years after his first appearance, during which time I will pay him three hundred a year, and—a—of course I shall make what engagements I please for him."

"Certain'y, sir," said Mr. Maggs. "And of course the pay of them there engagements 'll go to you."

"Of course," replied the London manager, smiling. "That is, if there should be any pay."

"And how much will it cost to put our Sam to that master, sir?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"About a couple of hundreds, we'll say," the London manager replied.

"Wery well, sir! we're much obliged to you, I'm sure," said Mr. Maggs. "But I've saved a bit o' brass myself. Mother, where's them notes?"

"Here, Samwel," replied Mrs. Maggs, bringing out of her pocket a canvas bag, that seemed tolerably full.

"You see, sir, we brought 'em with us, thinking they would be wanted to set our Sam up as a reg'lar hand at it," said Mr. Maggs, undoing a roll of bank notes on the table. "Here they are, sir. There's five hundred pound; will that do?"

Mr. Drust laughed and took snuff. Mr. Somerset Danvers laughed too. "I did not know you were so rich, Mr. Maggs," he said. "Gad! Drust, I wish we could sport bank-notes like that! However, put your money away in the bank again, and I'll give your son a letter of introduction to a gentleman who will give him the finishing touches, and prepare him for the profession; then you may bring

ut your canvas bag, for it will be wanted, I can ssure you."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Maggs, rising. 'Now, ladies and gentlemen, this 'ere day is a glorious one with me, and so if you'll all come to Belle Vue, I'll stand treat for the whole. I'll not grudge a five or ten pun' note when our Sam is acknowledged to be a genus."

This offer being politely declined, Mr. Maggs ouckled his wife under his arm, and telling Sam and Tom to fall in behind, assured them it was his intention to go in for a reg'lar good 'un that day, or his name wasn't Maggs; for his Sam's fortin' was made, and he was the father of a genus. "And hang me if I knowed it," he chuckled all the way down the stairs. "*I'm blowed if I ever dreamt it.*"

When Madam Zulmann was alone with Marion, she put to that young lady a most pointed question. "Marion," she said, fixing her eyes steadily on her daughter, "look into my eyes and answer me truly. Are you in love with young Burton?"

Marion looked at her mother for one moment, and then her eyes fell before that earnest gaze.

"I am," she answered softly. "Oh, so much!"

"Then do all you can to win him," said her mother. "You are handsome—aye, as handsome as I was in years gone by. It is worth attempting."

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Seedly, of The Moat, was a short, stout, hale and hearty bachelor of about fifty. His red face and scarlet coat displayed a beautiful harmony of colour, as he stood on the step of the entrance to the old-fashioned residence which owned him as master one hunting morning towards the close of December. His get-up was remarkably good. The well-made scarlet coat, the cord breeches, loose about the thighs and snug at the knee, the well-cleaned brown boots, the broad-brimmed hat, and the heavy hazel hunting crop he held in his hand, all

thoroughly workmanlike.

"How is the mare, John?" he said to the groom who brought his hunter round from the stables. "Does she seem like going to-day?"

"I should say, sir," replied John, touching his cap, "she'd go alarming. That sweat I gave her has done her a heap of good."

"Gad! I hope she's steady!" said Mr. Seedly. "You and I are growing older, John, and, upon my word, I think I ought to give up riding young horses."

"She'll be a little fresh, sir, I 'spect, when she gets in company," John replied. "But after the first fence or so, your weight will steady her, I should say."

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Mr. Seedly. "Fourteen stun is no joke to carry across country. She *is* a beauty though, and if as good as she looks, is cheap at a hundred and fifty."

The mare *was* a beauty. She stood just fifteen three, with short legs, a deep round barrel well ribbed up, strong drooping quarters which would carry her through dirt and let her down easily on the right side of her fences, a neat blood-like head —quite a Shropshire head John declared—and was rising six.

"Well, it's ten o'clock," said Mr. Seedly, after he had examined the roomy saddle, the Melton girths, the breast-plate, and let the curb down a link. "They meet at eleven, and it's ten miles to cover. I must be off."

John held the off stirrup-iron while his master with some difficulty hoisted himself into his saddle. It is not so easy for an elderly gentleman standing five feet six, and inclined to be stout, to hoist himself on to the back of a fifteen three horse.

"Have the clothing warmed, and a bucket of gruel ready by five," he continued, as he dropped his right foot easily into the stirrup. "Now then, my lass, steady! fair and easy goes a long way."

She trotted quietly down the short drive and into the turnpike-road, taking care to keep on the turfy side all the way. The mare carried him along at that pace peculiar to hunting men when on their way to cover, playing with the bit, which hunting men so much love.

"Fresh!" said Mr. Seedly to himself, as he felt the morning air fan his cheek, and he began to

speculate on the chances of their having a run. "She may be fresh, but she's quiet as a lamb. Why, a lady might ride her in a plain snaffle."

At that moment, whether the mare understood what her rider was saying, and desired to show him the uncertainty of all human affairs, or whether she had any particular antipathy to donkeys, is uncertain; but just as Mr. Seedley had decided in his own mind that the mare was as quiet as a lamb, and that John was certainly becoming too nervous to have to do with young horses, they met a boy driving a donkey in a cart, and the mare, after siding unpleasantly close to the open drain by the road side, gave two or three plunges, which a sharp jerk of the curb did not tend to abate, and set off at score.

"Hullo! woa!" said Mr. Seedly, who was pitched on to the pommel of the saddle, digging his spurs into the mare's shoulders. "What the deuce are you at? Well, you beggar!" he continued, as he got himself right, "that was touch and go, at any rate! but if we have a run, and you come home as fresh as you start, hang me, but you'll be a good one."

"I shan't be late to-day, at any rate," he said, after having endeavoured to get a pull at the mare. "Gad! it almost looks like running away. Confound it! and there are two pink coats and a lady just in front."

It was becoming unpleasant, Mr. Seedly began to think. The mare was hot, and if she went on in this way she would be regularly pumped by the time he arrived at the meet. She might get lamed. She was sure to try her legs on the hard road, and those

muffs on in front would tell everybody his nag had run away with him. Hang it all! he would try whether she had a mouth or not. And having come to this conclusion, he sat back in his saddle, gathered up his reins, and began to saw the mare's mouth. She tried to get her head down, threw it wildly about, but finding herself held by a ton weight, and becoming more and more aware that the operation of sawing was peculiarly unpleasant, she thought it would be more conducive to her comfort if she decreased her pace, and just as the two pinks and the lady had pulled on one side to let him pass, Mr. Seedly was able to pull the mare into a trot again.

"Hullo, Seedly!" said the elder of the two. "Good morning! you seem to be in a desperate hurry."

"Good morning, Gunnell! good morning, Philip! Ah! Miss Constance, so you are going to show us the way to-day, are you?" said Mr. Seedly, raising his hat to the young lady, who sat her horse very badly.

"I'm only just going to see you find, and then I must go home again," replied Miss Constance Revell. "Mr. Gunnell kindly offered to give me a mount, but mamma would not hear of my going unless I promised to return home as soon as they found. But what were you coming along at such a pace for? We heard you galloping as though you were riding a race, and half feared you would have been over us."

"Run away with, *I* should say," remarked Mr. Philip Gunnell, taking his cigar from his mouth, and running his eye over Mr. Seedly and the mare.

"Not at all, Phil!" replied Mr. Seedly. "The fact is, I saw you on ahead some distance back, and I thought I would just canter until I overtook you."

"Looked very much like it," said Mr. Philip. "I know I wouldn't *canter* my horse like that over the hard road for any living soul."

"You ride hard enough across country, anyway!" remarked Miss Revell, shaking her whip at Mr. Philip. "I know you do! and I've a good mind to keep close to you all day. I would too, hadn't I promised to go back soon."

Mr. Philip vowed to himself he would see her hanged before he gave her a chance of being with him the whole of a hunting day. He merely remarked, however, that "he was not good at opening gates."

Presently they arrived at Brankley Gorse, just as the hounds came up. There were a large number of horsemen present, and a few ladies. About fifty of the men were in scarlet, giving colour to the scene, which, indeed, was an animated one. Mr. Seedly, after wishing the Master a good morning, fell back among a crowd of other horsemen, and talked cotton, scandal, politics, or whatever makes up the subject of conversation of hunting men during the interval between the arrival of the hounds and their being thrown into cover.

Exactly at eleven the Master waved his cap towards the gorse, and in a moment every hound was in. Then came the moment of shortening of stirrups, taking up of curbs, and throwing away of cigar ends, for the cover was small, and a sure find. Presently one hound spoke, and half a dozen of her gossips

were immediately seen leaping over the prickly gorse, with their sterns waving. "Beller has it!" said the huntsman. "Hoy, Beller! Get in, Rover!" Then another whimper from Bella, who was working herself up to a state of unquenchable desire for blood.

"Tally ho!" shouts a young fellow in the newest of scarlet coats and the newest of boots, and mounted on a thoroughbred screw.

Immediately the hounds dashed to the holloa, and a hundred and fifty horsemen rode as if for their lives towards the same point. When the pack came out of the cover, however, they threw their heads up and would not own the scent.

"Hullo! what's this?" said the Master, galloping up. "Who viewed him?"

"I did," replied the young man in scarlet. "He broke from this corner, almost under my horse's nose."

"Strange!" said the Master, looking from the hounds to the man who said he saw the fox break cover. "Are you sure it was a fox?"

"Of course I am!" replied the young fellow.

"Nought o' t' sort!" drawled out a labourer, who was standing near, and who was grinning all over his face. "Nought o 't' sort. 'Twas a hare; I seed him."

I will not describe the language of the Master. I will not hint at the information of a personal nature which the huntsman imparted to that unhappy young man. Neither will I divulge what was said by those hundred and fifty horsemen who galloped to his "hollo," nor how he was confidentially advised by a gentleman mounted on a donkey, to go home for a

dashed fool, and hang himself up in his shop window. I will only remark that he was seen leading his horse through a gap in the fence that bordered the road soon after, but *after that* was seen no more.

The hounds were now again thrown into the cover, and immediately hit on a burning scent. How they whimpered and challenged! "Have at him, Solomon!" shouts the huntsman. "Now, Beller! Now, Skylark!" Then *such* a burst of music as they drove him from one hiding-place to another.

Mr. Seedly was in the act of letting his right stirrup leather down a hole, when he saw the second whip at the far corner of the gorse hold up his hat. In a moment he had rammed his foot well home, and catching hold of the young one sent him at a low fence which stood between him and the point from which it was now evident the fox had broken. He had not gone many yards before the Master galloped by him at forty miles an hour, blowing the pack on to the line.

"Gone away! gone away!" shouted the whip.

"Give them time, gentlemen," said the Master, as two or three horsemen rushed away so close to the hounds as to render it probable they would drive them off the scent. "Ah, I thought so!" he continued with a grin of delight, as the three came to grief at a quickset fence with a wide ditch on the taking-off side. "Confound you! I hope you'll remain there all day, and learn to ride at your fences like Christians. And try to ride *to* hounds, and not over them," he roared, as he cleared the fence.

Mr. Seedly had now settled down among the first

flight, the mare carrying him beautifully. The fox took a line over as pretty a grass country as can be found out of Leicestershire, with fences made of banks, posts and rails, and a fair proportion of big, wide ditches.

After seven miles at best pace, the ground having become stained by a flock of sheep, the hounds came to a check for three minutes, giving some of the stragglers time to get up. Without having been lifted a yard, they presently hit off the scent again, and then commenced one of the prettiest bits of hunting ever seen. Every hound followed the scent across a fallow on to the grass again, and then the pack went away as if tied to the fox's brush.

Mr. Seedly, in the meantime, was congratulating himself on having at last got a clipper. "She's a beauty!" he said, as he sailed along to the left of the hounds. "And as temperate as a hack. Steady mare! steady!"

This admonition was called forth by the mare pricking her ears forward, and throwing up her head, and straining to increase the pace. Mr. Seedly, looking in front of him, saw a post and rail fence, new, high, and apparently unfortunately strong, which Mr. Philip Gunnell had just cleared, and his father had come to grief over.

"This will never do," he thought. "It's five feet high if it's an inch. The mare could never do it under my weight. In fact, 'twould be a shame to ask her. I'll wait until somebody breaks the top rail." And Mr. Seedly, whose heart failed him, endeavoured to pull up. He might as well have tried to move a church, for the mare, having seen

Mr. Philip Gunnell's horse clear the fence, determined to have it. When he found it was of no use trying to stop her, and that he must either go at it or tumble off, he crammed his hat firmer on his head, hoped he shouldn't break his neck, and hardening his heart as he neared the dreaded timber, gave her involuntarily a touch of the spur, and his heart failing him at the last minute, jerked the curb, and found himself lying on the right side of the fence with the crown of his hat knocked in, and all the breath knocked out of his body, while the mare scrambled from her nose, with which she was ploughing, on to her legs, and trotted off, leaving her rider on his back in a forty-acre field.

I think it is one of the most pitiable conditions in the world for an elderly gentleman to be struggling along a wet, spongy field, in top-boots and a crushed hat, shouting, "Stop my horse!" In this condition, however, Mr. Seedly spent a considerable time. Three times he had got the mare into a corner and was about to seize the reins, when she lashed out with her heels, and quietly trotted off to another part of the field. He then took off his hat, baring his bald head to the cold December winds, and crept quietly to her, calling, "C'up! c'up!" in the fond hope of persuading her his hat held a feed of oats. She would come close enough for him to touch her with the tips of his fingers, and would again leave him in despair. At length, by the judicious expenditure of half-a-crown, he obtained the help of two labourers who were at work in an adjoining field, and was soon mounted again, and walking the mare by a line of gates to the high

road, with the intention of getting over the eighteen miles which separated him from The Moat, as soon as possible.

"What a fool I was!" he observed to himself when he had lighted a cigar and got it well under weigh. "She would have cleared it safe enough if I hadn't checked her. Confound it! I believe I'm growing old. I usedn't to funk timber like that!" And he smoked away vigorously for about five minutes. At last he said, as he drove his penknife through the end of his cigar to make it draw better, "It's the same, I suppose, all the world over; when I was too poor to hunt at all, I'd have ridden the worst screw that ever saw hounds over that timber, and now I can afford to ride a good nag, I haven't got the pluck. *Then* I had plenty of nerve and precious little money, and *now* I've got plenty of money, but my nerve is going. Dash it! the world is contrary. If I'd only got the coin when I was a youngster, I *would* have shown them how to go. There's hundreds of fellows, whose stables are full, who never care to throw their leg over a horse, unless it is to show their scarlet coats, while many another poor beggar, who goes on shanks' mare, would keep the biggest stud in England in work."

In this train of thought he walked his mare along the roadsides until he had finished his second cigar, and the lengthening shadows told him the day was growing old. With the final reflection "that this world would not be such a bad sort of place *if one could only get the good things of it in time to enjoy them*," he put the mare into a trot, and kept her at it, until she stood before the front door of The Moat.

"I hope she carried you well, sir," said John, holding the mare by the head while his master dismounted.

"Pretty well!" replied Mr. Seedly, rubbing the small of his back, and making a face as he felt a pain in that region and about his shoulder blades. "In fact, famous!"

"She hanna' throwed you, I hope, sir," John said, looking at his master, who was beginning to feel the effects of his fall.

"Eh? Oh dear, of course not!" replied his master. "Only you can't expect a man to be always five-and-twenty, can you? Confound it! I wish I could feel myself at that age again, you wouldn't catch me thr— I mean I wouldn't be taking cold in my back, I can tell you. Now take her in, John, and let's have no washing. You bind her legs in warm bandages, and rug her up well, and let her have her gruel. In half-an-hour she'll be dry, and you can brush all the dirt off. I'll come out as soon as I've dined."

John led the mare to the stables at the back of the house, and Mr. Seedly proceeded to his dressing-room, where a big fire was roaring away in the grate, his bath ready, the baked towels hanging in front of the fire, and his evening clothes laid out. A square cut-glass decanter of brandy, and a plate of biscuits, stood on a small table, while a small copper kettle sang away cheerfully on the hob.

He first divested himself of his hunting clothes, and got into the warm bath. He then mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy and water, and sat soaking a biscuit in it, and taking an occasional sip.

After some little time he got out of his bath, dried himself, and then dressed; muttering all the while at the stiffness of his back. "It *was* a cropper," he said, as he slowly descended to the snug dining-room. "Gad! I'll lie in bed to-morrow."

The moment Mr. Seedly entered the dining-room, a buxom servant girl brought in the soup; and Mr. Seedly's eyes beamed, as the girl, in answer to his question, said "it was oxtail."

"That's the ticket!" he said. "When a man is tired nothing picks him up like a hot plate of oxtail. That's *your* experience, any way, Silas, my boy."

"Your letters, sir!" said his housekeeper, entering; "the postman was late to-day."

There were about a dozen of them. Rapidly sorting them, he handed eight of them to his housekeeper, with the remark "that he knew the sort of envelopes prospectuses were always sent in, and she might burn them." The other four he placed by the side of his plate, saying, "Business first — pleasure afterwards. You'll keep until I've finished dinner."

If Mr. Seedly's fall had affected his back, it certainly had not his appetite. Before he had been at it half an hour, he was pleased with his dinner, and delighted with his cook. "That woman is a treasure," he said, helping himself to the breast of a pheasant. "Women are first-rate creatures when confined—I'll take a little more gravy, I think—to their proper places. A woman in a dining-room, waiting on a bachelor or two, is a mistake; but a man in the same situation is barbarous. Have

every course put on the table and help yourself. That's my motto."

When the dessert was placed on the table, and Mr. Seedly was left alone with the claret and his letters, he drew his chair up by the fire, and long and carefully examined each of the four envelopes. "Who the deuce are they from, I wonder?" he said, turning them over and looking at them. "I hate letters since I've been out of business. I wish I wasn't going to have any more. Well, I s'pose I must open them!"

The first one he opened he rapidly cast his eye over, and with the simple remark "Confound you!" flung it on the fire. The next was an application for pecuniary assistance to send a hundred thousand copies of "The Converted Thief" to the poor negro. This was also consigned to the flames, with the remark that "the poor negro was becoming rather a nuisance." The next he opened had a different effect on him. He read it through twice, and then ringing the bell violently, said, as he looked at his watch, "Tell John to have the dog-cart round in five minutes. I'll just have time to catch the train."

"You surely are not going out now, sir," said the housekeeper. "And your back so bad!"

"Confound the back!" he replied. "Poor Joe! poor Joe! My God, how they're all dropping off!" And a tear trickled down the little man's cheek as he struggled into his overcoat.

"You'll be laid up after this, sir!" said Mrs. Bickley, the housekeeper. "You know you're not well, and the sleet is falling very heavy. Why not send John?"

"No, no!" replied the little man. "It shall never be said that Silas Seedly ever allowed the weather or a pain in his back prevent his standing by an old friend in distress. To-morrow is Christmas Eve, too! No! no! I'd never be able to look you in the face, ma'am, if I didn't go. Get me my umbrella, and I'll be off!"

So the little man went out into the night on an errand of mercy, and Mrs. Bickley, after watching the dog-cart through the gate and into the road, returned and read the letter which lay on the dining-table, and I think under the circumstances we may as well read it too. It was as follows:—

"My dear Seedly,—Poor Joe Wright is very ill —dying, I fear. He was obliged to give up his engagement as critic to the *Slasher* some time since through ill health, and his means are now exhausted. I appeal to you, for the sake of old times when we were all poor together, and especially in the name of the season approaching, when all men's hearts should be open to each other, to do what you can to alleviate his distress, and soothe those hours which I fear will be his last. I have only just left him, and he appears to me to be sinking fast.

"Ever yours,

"Ishmael Drust.

"P.S.—The address of the house in which he is lodging is on the other side."

"Another of them newspaper fellers!" said Mrs. Bickley, putting down the letter, and wiping the corner of her eye, in a moment of abstraction, with her master's dinner napkin. "They're always under

the weather, and they're always dying. I'm afraid most of 'em is loosish too, and too fond of their wine when they can get it, as I've noticed in this very room. Though I *will* say Mr. Wright was a exception, and a decent man, as didn't go on with any of his nonsense to me when the master's back was turned, which is what a many of them can't say."

Mrs. Bickley then made the fire up, after which she stood for a few moments holding the poker in her hand as if lost in thought. Presently she sighed, sat herself in her master's chair, and placed her feet on the fender. Then she sighed again, and said, addressing the poker, which she still held in her hand, "I wonder he's never gone and got married! So well able to afford it too. There's many a woman as would be glad to make him happy!"

After these confidences between herself and the poker, she sat for some time in silence, probably reckoning in her mind in how many particulars *she* was fitted to make him happy. By-and-by she turned towards the table, and looking at the bottle which, had Mr. Seedly been sitting in his chair, would have stood close by his elbow, she observed thoughtfully, "I wonder he will always drink clar't! Clar't may be good enough in summer when it's tremenjous hot. I can't deny but I'm partial to it myself in the dog-days, nicely qualified with lemonade. It must be awful cold in winter though. I wonder whether it is cold!" she continued, as she gazed at the bottle with a half-doubtful look on her face. "I've a good mind to try!" she added. And reaching her hand towards it she took it up, removed the cork, and applied it to her nose. Three times

she sniffed and held her breath, and after each time the look of doubt and perplexity on her face deepened. Again she stared into the fire, and again her gaze reverted to the bottle, which she had replaced on the table. At length she rose from her seat, and taking a glass she filled it, remarking to herself, "This uncertainty is a-wearing me out. Thank God, I aren't at all curious, but I *must* find out whether it's cold, or I shan't sleep to-night!"

Slowly she carried the glass to her lips and took a sip. The greatest uncertainty was depicted on her countenance. She took another, and then held the half-emptied glass towards the light and solemnly gazed at it. "Is it cold, or isn't it?" she murmured. "I'm afraid it is, and yet I don't know. It's very deceptive. I really must find out," she continued, after a short pause. "I *will* find out!" And the glass was again carried to her lips, and when replaced on the table it was empty. For two minutes Mrs. Bickley stood regarding the empty glass and the half-emptied bottle, as if endeavouring to come to a final decision. At the end of that time she rubbed her right hand briskly across the front of her silk dress body, and said emphatically, "It is cold! awfully cold! My innards feel like a mounting of ice. I must have something to take the chill off!" At this moment her eye fell once more on the bottle, and her solemn look relaxed, and her eye softened. "The very thing!" she exclaimed, smiling. "I'll mull it!"

Mrs. Bickley briskly moved towards the old-fashioned sideboard in the room, and opening one of the doors took from the lowest shelf a brightly-

polished, funnel-shaped utensil, into which she emptied the bottle and placed it on the fire, remarking, as she did it, "She could have it cleaned and polished before the master came home."

When the claret was steaming hot she added some spice and a slice or two of lemon, and drawing her chair more towards the centre of the fender, on which she placed her feet somewhat wide apart, she drew up her dress until there was exposed to the heat of the fire several inches of white stocking above her ankles, and proceeded to correct the effects of the experimental glass. Evidently the cure was not an unpleasant one, for she sat calmly and peacefully until the clock struck eleven, at the last stroke of which she rose from her chair, rearranged her dress, and, after putting out the lights and fixing the fire-guard, left the room with a heightened colour, saying, "He's sure not to be home to-night, and a good little feller he is to go out at all. I'll just go and make some jelly, and get a basket ready, for it's sure to be wanted in the morning to send to pore Mr. Wright, which I always said had a weak chest and was in a decline. Ah!" she continued, as she made her way into the kitchen, "if he only could see which was his best way to be happy! He wants a good sensible wife; not a fine stuck-up one, but one as could make jelly and mull his clar't." And if the truth must be told, Mrs. Bickley thought she knew the very person who would suit him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. Seedly was just in time to catch the Manchester train, and in the course of three-quarters of an hour found himself at the Victoria Station. Here he engaged a cab, in which he first deposited his big umbrella and then himself, and was driven to the address given him on the letter.

The street in which the ex-critic to the *Slasher* was lodging, was one that came under the denomination of shabby-genteel. There was an absence of that rowdyism to be found in the lower quarters of our large towns, but on the other hand there was an air of poverty about the street which was extremely painful to the little man after leaving the snug, warm, and well-lighted dining-room of The Moat. The ghosts of former days came crowding on him as he thought of the sick man, and the noisy bouts they had had when both were young and full of hope—hope, alas! in the case of one of them never to be realised.

When he arrived at the house in which his old friend lay ill, he regarded it from the outside as though he expected something in its exterior would have shadowed forth the play that was being enacted within—the ebbing away of a man's life. But finding nothing to distinguish it from any of the other

houses in the street, he at length went to the door and gave a timid knock. A slipshod girl, with a dirty face and untidy hair, holding a tallow candle in one hand, opened the door and inquired what he wanted.

"Does Mr. Wright live here?" asked the little man.

"Yes," the girl answered.

"I wish to see him," he said.

"Are you the doctor?" the girl inquired.

"No," he replied in a whisper, "I am his friend."

"Eh, dear me!" said the girl, snuffing the candle with her fingers. "I'm glad he's got a friend. I'm sure I didn't think he had any, except two or three who come here, and seem to be quite as bad off as hisself. Stop here a minute, and I'll go and tell him."

The girl left him in darkness, her shoes, which appeared to have been originally intended for some one with considerably larger feet, making a noise on the uncarpeted passage. The place appeared to Mr. Seedly to be very damp, and not at all wholesome. The light the girl carried had a circle round it like a small unhealthy moon in dirty weather, and the little man became aware of an unhealthy, musty smell pervading the house.

After waiting for what appeared to him to be a considerable time, the girl reappeared with the candle, and told him he might step up.

"Is he very bad?" he asked, as he followed her up a narrow, damp staircase.

"Oh, shocking!" she replied, wiping her nose with the back of her hand. "He always seemed to me to be a pore rickety gentleman, but the last three weeks

he's a-got wusser and wusser, and it's my belief as he can't get no wuss in this world. Jest hear him corf!"

Mr. Seedly stopped and grasped the baluster of the stairs. Some one was coughing just overhead —a harsh, hacking cough, every sound of which went to the little man's heart like the cut of a knife.

"Is that him?" he asked in a whisper.

The girl nodded. "He's at it like that all day *and* all night," she said. "Sometimes he seems as if he was going to choke. Mind your head! This is the door. You can go in; nobody ain't there, except Polly."

Mr. Seedly tapped gently at the door of the sick man's room.

"Come in," said a voice.

The little man entered, walking on his toes. The furniture of the room was of the most scanty description. A low four-post bed, the posts of which had been sawn off, stood in one corner, on which lay a man apparently in the last stage of consumption. His black hair hung about his pale, thin, clammy face; his beard, which he wore full, was streaked with grey, and a flake or two of froth lay on it. His thin, transparent hands hung over the bed. His eyes, though sunken and livid underneath, were dark and brilliant in the extreme. On a chair at the foot of the bed sat a young girl, with her face buried in her handkerchief. Immediately Mr. Seedly entered the room, she rose and quietly withdrew.

"Ah! Silas, my boy!" gasped the sick man. "Who would have thought of seeing you here?"

At this moment he had another paroxysm of coughing, which, when over, left him exhausted.

The little man knelt down by the side of the bed, and taking his friend's hand in his, sobbed out, "Poor Joe! my poor lad! can I do anything for you?"

The sick man was lying back gasping for breath. The effort of respiration seemed too great for his shattered body. A smile stole over his face as he placed his hand on his friend's partially bald head, and patting it, he gasped in a voice scarcely audible, "Good lad! good old Silas!"

"Do you remember, old man, our old days together?" he continued after a pause, in a whisper. "Ishmael has been here frequently of late. Good old boy, Ishmael! dreadfully poor though, like me. Poor as a rook!"

"How long have you been like this, Joe?" asked Mr. Seedly, while the tears ran down his florid cheeks. "Why didn't you let me know you were a bit under the weather?"

A gleam of humour lighted up the pallid face for a moment. "Had I written you whenever I was down on my luck, I should have spent a fortune in postage stamps," he whispered with a smile.

"Have you had a doctor?" asked Mr. Seedly.

"Yes," the sick man replied. "But he has so many patients! he is provided by the parish, Silas."

"O God!" exclaimed the little man, burying his face in his hands. "Joe! Joe! 'twas cruel of you not to come to me."

"Never mind, Silas," he replied, smiling on him. "It will be all over soon, and if there's any truth in

what the parsons tell us, we three may meet again. It's worth believing, old man."

After this there was silence in the room, broken only by the sick man's heavy and laborious breathing. Mr. Seedly sat watching him as the time slowly dragged on, his thoughts full of the old times now gone for ever. Presently his old friend fell into a fitful slumber, and still he watched on, far into the night. At length he awoke, and seeing Mr. Seedly still by his bedside, said, "Silas, you'll be late. You had better leave now. What time is it?"

"Half-past one," replied the little man, looking at his watch. "I'll go out, and get a doctor to see you. We must have the opinion of a first-rate man, and if he'll allow me to remove you, I'll have you off to The Moat to-morrow."

"Too late!" he gasped.

"I hope not, Joe," said the little man, wiping his eyes. "If I had only known of this before, we would have had you on your legs by this time."

The sick man shook his head. "I've burnt the candle at both ends," he whispered. "Good-bye, Silas."

"Not good-bye," said Mr. Seedly. "I'll be back again presently, and I'll bring the doctor with me."

When he left the room, he found the girl who had admitted him sitting on the landing with her head resting against the damp wall, fast asleep.

"My good girl," he said, "here, get up. You shouldn't go to sleep on the stairs. You ought to be in bed."

She got up and rubbed her eyes. "No, no!" she answered, smothering a yawn. "I haven't been

in bed for ten nights, and I aren't a-goin' to go until he's better or wuss. He was a kind gentleman when he was up, and who is there to give him anythink if he should want it in the night but me and Polly? And she's regular wore out."

"And so will you be, my good girl," said the little man.

"No," she replied. "I may look delicate, but I'm horrid tough."

"Has he any comforts, here?" Mr. Seedly asked.

"What sort of comforts do you mean?" she inquired. "Polly and me nurses him, if that's it."

"Has he any wine, or jellies, or anything of that sort?" said the little man.

"Wine or jellies, or anythink of that sort!" she replied with astonishment. "Not a drop! not a spic! not a spot! He's nought but bread and gruel, and precious little of that."

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed, wiping his eyes with one hand, while the other dived into his breeches pocket. "Here I've heaps of money and no nerve —I mean lots of money and poor Joe none. It is a contrary world!"

After searching for some time he found his purse, and emptying it into the girl's hands, he said, "Get all the nice things you can think of as soon as ever it's daylight. Poor Joe! poor Joe! I'll be off now, and knock Turner up."

When Mr. Seedly left the house, he walked away briskly towards the Star Hotel, where he intended spending the night, with the intention of hiring a cab at the corner of Market Street, if any should be

on the stand. The night was dark and cold, and the whole town seemed to him to be wrapped in gloom. This may have been but the result of his own feelings, or it may have been what some tell us is true, that nature goes in mourning on the eve of any great tragedy. And a tragedy was about to be enacted in that neighbourhood: when the clock should strike eight that morning, a criminal was to be executed at the Old Bailey. Had he known of this, it is probable he would have chosen some other way to his destination than that which led over the bridge, just beyond the prison walls, and in that case a considerable part of this history would not have been written. But he was not aware of the fact, and walked briskly on until he gained the centre of the bridge.

It usually happens that when any of our fellow-creatures are to be hurried into eternity in a more expeditious manner than nature intended, and more especially if their exit off the stage is to be made with the assistance of the hangman, all the ruffians and gaol-birds in the neighbourhood are sure to put in an appearance. It seems to have an irresistible attraction for them. On this night they were prowling about the prison walls, waiting eagerly for the approaching tragedy. When Mr. Seedly had arrived at the centre of the bridge, three ruffians of the worst type came from under the shadow of the parapet and accosted him.

"A fine night, guv'nor," said one of them.

"I'm glad you think so," replied the little man.

"You needn't be sulky about it," said another. "Where are you off to?"

"I'm on business, and I'm in a hurry," replied the little man. "I wish you good night."

"Not so fast, guv'nor," said one of them, seizing him by the collar. "You'll leave us your ticker for a keepsake, any way." And he immediately snatched the watch from the little man's fob.

"Hands off, you rogue!" shouted the little man, brandishing his umbrella. "Keep off, or I'll ram this down your throat!"

"Give him a nobbler, Bill," said one of the ruffians; and immediately he received a blow on the back of the head which laid him on the ground.

"I know you, you villains!" shouted the little man. "Help! police! murder!"

"Look sharp!" said the one who appeared the leader. "Here is somebody coming. Have you emptied his pockets?"

"Yes!"

"Help! help!" shouted the little man. "I'm being murdered."

"Will you? We'll stop your jaw, then," the ruffian swore. "Here, Bill, over with him!"

They had dragged him towards a part of the parapet which was undergoing repair, and the next moment there was a cry as of some one in mortal agony, a dull splash in the turgid waters beneath, and a hurrying of men from the scene of violence, and of others towards it.

Now, fortunately for Mr. Seedly, on that very night Mr. Maggs, and Sam, and Tom had been spending a few hours with the low comedian of the Queen's Theatre, at a tavern in the vicinity of Spring Gardens, and having remained in that gen-

tleman's society longer than they had intended, were hurrying on their way home, just when Mr. Seedly gave that cry as he was flung over the bridge.

"What's that, father?" said Sam, stopping and grasping his father's arm.

"Mischief, I'm afeard, Sam," replied Mr. Maggs. "This is an awkward place for a lone man at this time of night."

"Well, father," said Sam, "some one may be murdered, and we listening to them."

"True, Sam!" exclaimed Mr. Maggs. "I didn't think of that. Now, then, put up your elbows and run. Come on, maties!" And Mr. Maggs ran as hard as his bandy legs could carry him towards that part of the bridge whence the cry seemed to come.

Fast as Mr. Maggs ran, the two lads ran faster, and were soon on the spot where the parapet of the bridge was broken.

"It must have been about here, Tom," Sam said. "I'm sure the cry came from the bridge, and this is nearly the end of it. Do you see anything?"

"No," Tom replied, "Here, Sam, hold me by the hand, and I'll swing over, and see if anyone is below."

Sam grasped Tom's hand in his, and the latter stepped over the broken parapet, holding on by his other hand to the stones of the bridge.

"Can you see anything, Tom?" asked Sam.

"I hardly know," Tom replied. "Grasp tight, Sam, and I'll go a little lower."

"Do you see anything now?" inquired Sam, breathlessly. "Here's father come."

"I think I do," replied Tom. "Hold on half a

minute. I see it! I believe there's a man clinging to the side of the bridge. For heaven's sake look if there's a rope among the builder's gear."

In a moment Mr. Maggs was down on his hands and knees groping among the stones and rubbish. "Thank God!" he said, "here's a rope. Look out! I'll drop you the end of it. Give it a twist round your arm, matey, and down you goes."

Tom did as Mr. Maggs directed him. "Let go, Sam!" he shouted, and the next moment he had dropped into the river with a splash, seizing the body of Mr. Seedly, who, though insensible, still clung with all the tenacity of a drowning man to a pole which was fixed in the bed of the river for the support of the scaffolding.

To say that the lad was not in mortal fear would be to disguise the truth, for the stream was strong, and he could not swim a stroke. He saw all the danger of the attempt, and that possibly he might lose his own life in that attempt. But there was a fellow-creature in dire extremity. "I'll save him if I live," he said with clenched teeth and lowered brows, as the current swept them some few feet beneath the bridge. A terrible moment that was to all of them but Mr. Seedly. He had already tasted of the bitterness of death, and the cup had passed from him. By this time a crowd had gathered, and a score of strong arms were hauling at the rope for life or death. Out they came from under the arch with a surge and a swirl, the waters rushing over them as they were dragged against the stream, and the lad with clenched teeth and face all white turned upwards to the stars.

"Are you all right?" cried Sam, leaning over the bridge, and peering down into the dark flood.

"All right, old boy!" Tom replied, faintly. "But look sharp! I can't hold out much longer."

Within a few moments both of them were laid out on the footpath of the bridge apparently lifeless. Various modes of resuscitation were advocated. Some strongly advised holding them upside down to let the water run out of them, while others as strongly advised rolling them on barrels. Mr. Maggs, however, came out stupendously.

"This is a doctor's affair," he said, "and a doctor they must have. Now, maties, look alive, and lend a hand. Gently does it, my hearties, and gently it is. Is there a doctor's shop hereabouts, or isn't there?"

"There's one close by in Brazennose Street," said a man who was helping to carry them.

"Then to Brazennose Street we goes," said Mr. Maggs. "Now then, brothers, march, and may He in His great marcy presarve them two!—the man as was knocked over, and my brave boy as went in arter him."

They were very soon in Doctor Goodfellow's surgery, and means were taken for their resuscitation. Mr. Maggs and Sam hung over the lad in the greatest distress. For a considerable time neither of them showed signs of reanimation, and the doctor began to look grave.

"Do you think as he'll come to?" asked Mr. Maggs, with white lips.

"I hope so," the doctor replied gravely. "We never give up hope in these cases until forced to."

"Oh, dear!" said the little man with a sob; "an' is it so bad as that? Oh, Tom, my boy, this is a wery miserable night for Hulme Terrace!"

Sam was weeping bitterly already.

"Now, my good fellows," said the doctor, "crying will do no good. If you will stop that, and help to bring them round, you'll be of some service."

"Anything, sir, as Sam and me can do, we will do," sobbed Mr. Maggs, pulling off his coat. "An' anything we can't do, why, we'll try, any way."

"Very well! Now do as I do. Turn him from his back on to his side, and at the same moment lift his arm above his head, and then on his back again. Keep on doing that until we can get the hot water and blankets ready, and all may be well yet."

Mr. Maggs and Sam went to work with a will, and turned Tom from his back to his side, and from his side to his back, until, had he been conscious, he would have ached in every bone. When the patients were undressed and put between the hot blankets, they chafed their feet and hands until the perspiration ran down over them—not over the patients, but over Mr. Maggs and Sam.

At length Tom gave signs of life. The doctor redoubled his exertions, and presently they were rewarded for their labour by a deep, struggling sigh, and a feeble pulsation of the heart.

"Oh, blessed sigh!" exclaimed Mr. Maggs in ecstasy. "Oh, Sam! that's the sweetest sigh as I ever heard sighed in all my life. He's a-comin' to!"

"There's the other sighed then, father!" said

Sam, wiping his eyes, and rubbing away at Mr. Seedly's extremities with renewed ardour.

"Go it, Sam!" Mr. Maggs said. "This is a blessed minute. Two feller-creatures saved from a briny grave, and one o' them our Tom. Did your chap sigh again then, Sam?"

"Yes!" Sam replied, smiling, though his eyes were still wet. "That's the second."

"Then he's a-comin' to, too," chuckled Mr. Maggs. "Hurroo, Sam! Go it, my boy! Blister their feet! Rub 'em until you get the skin off; 'tis all for their good."

"I've got them red-hot already, father!" Sam answered. "They're scorching. How are Tom's?"

"Burning! burning!" Mr. Maggs chuckled. "They'll be all afire directly. He don't like it, Sam; I know he don't. He moved then, Sam. I'm sure he meant it for a kick. He must have it though; it's all for his good."

"My man is getting some colour in his face, sir," said Sam, still rubbing away. "I think he'll get all right directly."

"We'll have both of them all right presently," the doctor replied. "I hope before long they'll have as much colour as your father, and that's saying something."

"They'll be precious hot then," Mr. Maggs said. "I'm a-sweating prodigious. 'Tis hotter work than cleaning out a flue, Sam."

Before long Tom had quite recovered his strength, and was able to sit up, and after drinking a glass of steaming hot brandy-and-water, he said he thought he could walk home.

"Will it be safe, sir?" asked Mr. Maggs of the doctor.

"Quite!" the doctor replied. "He is young and strong, and by to-morrow he won't be a bit the worse for his ducking."

"Then I'll get a cab," said Mr. Maggs, "and take him home this minute, for mother will be in a tremendous way about we three."

"Very well!" the doctor said; "and you had better come back in it when these young fellows are safe in bed. This gentleman I expect will want to speak to you."

A cab was procured from St. Ann's Square, and Tom, wrapped in the warm blankets, was placed in it, and Sam sat beside him. Mr. Maggs, instead of mounting the box, went back to the surgery, and putting his head inside the door, said in a loud whisper to the doctor, "What's to pay?"

"Nothing, my good fellow," replied the doctor, laughing. "'Twould be rather hard if people had to pay for the privilege of saving other people's lives. I suppose I may be guilty of a kindness as well as you, mayn't I?"

"Certain'y, sir," said Mr. Maggs. Then with a knowing smile beaming on his good-humoured countenance, he added, with a movement of the eye which appeared very like a wink, "I twig, sir! no charges between perfessional men. My name is Samwel Maggs, of Hulme Terrace, and from this time forth for evermore I'll sweep your chimblies for nothink!"

CHAPTER XIX.

When Mr. Maggs returned to Brazennose Street, he found Mr. Seedly, with the cut on his head plastered up, sipping hot grog in bed. The little man was looking white enough now, and his appearance was not made at all more cheerful by the bandages he had about his head. When Mr. Maggs entered the bedroom his eye brightened, and he held out his hand, saying, "The doctor tells me I have to thank you and two young fellows with you, who I believe are your sons, for saving my life. Believe me, I do thank you from the bottom of my heart. I thought it was all up with me when the villains threw me into that nasty dirty stream, I can tell you. I haven't got the taste of the foul water out of my mouth yet, and no wonder, considering I must have swallowed gallons of it."

"Sir," replied Mr. Maggs, taking the little man's hand in his, and shaking it up and down all the time he was speaking, "I'm wery happy to make your acquaintance, though the introduction was a little awkward, I will allow. I hope as you are feeling purty comfortable—in fact, quite yourself again.

"Hardly that, Mr.— I forget your name."

"Maggs, sir! Samwel Maggs, of Hulme Terrace, Salford," replied Mr. Maggs.

"Well, Mr. Maggs, a friend in need is a friend indeed, and you and your brave lads are the best friends I have seen for many a long day," said Mr. Seedly.

"Don't mention it, sir," Mr. Maggs remarked. "It's nothin', I do assure you."

"Nothing!" exclaimed the little man, sitting up in the bed. "It's something to *me*."

"I mean as it was nothin' worth talking about as me and Sam did," replied Mr. Maggs, apologetically. "Tom it was as did the business for you."

"Then here's Tom's good health, and to our better acquaintance," said the little man, emptying his tumbler. "You've a right noble fellow for a son, Mr. Maggs—a lad to be proud of."

"Certain'y, sir!" Mr. Maggs answered. "Tom is a peg or two above we, though he has lived with us six year."

"Isn't he your son, then?" inquired Mr. Seedly.

"Well, not exac'ly my son," Mr. Maggs replied, in a tone that intimated that it was not *his* fault that he was not. "I spec he's a gentleman born. Any way, he's a rare plucked one, for when he jumped in arter you he couldn't swim a stroke, an' that's gospel truth."

"Whose son is he, then?" inquired the little man, who was becoming profoundly interested in Tom.

"Ah, that's the pint!" Mr. Maggs replied, solemnly wagging his head. "I wish I knowed. He may be a dook or a markiss. But I'll tell you all I know."

Mr. Maggs then related as much of Tom's story as he knew, to which Mr. Seedly listened in silence. When Mr. Maggs had finished he said, "Now, Mr. Maggs, I haven't said much to you in the way of thanks, for my debt to you and your lads cannot be expressed in words. Besides that, I'm a poor hand at making speeches."

"Certain'y, sir," Mr. Maggs remarked, patting the back of the little man's hand with his. "It's all right, perfectly right!" And he smiled on and nodded at the tubby little figure in the bed.

"But it isn't all right!" the little man said. "I must show you I'm deeply grateful. Now I don't know what business you are in, but if any assistance in the way of capital, you know——"

"Thank'ee, sir, I know what you would say," Mr. Maggs replied, interrupting him; "but I don't want money. I've saved a tidy bit myself for our Sam. No, sir; I'm in the chimbly sweeping line, and though I say it as praps shouldn't, I'm at the top of my perfession. Anyone in Salford or Higher Broughton will tell you that Samwel Maggs, of Hulme Terrace, is a hartist, sir, in his own pecooliar line."

"And they may add, a right good fellow to boot," said the little man, laughing. "Mr. Maggs, I esteem it an honour to know you, and I hope you will not refuse my friendship. There's my hand on it."

"Sir, that's the kindest speech as I've heard for a wery long while. If you gentlemen would always talk like that to we workers, there would be a good fewer rascally radical lazyboneses a-stumpin' about

the country, a-lecturin', and a-jawin', and a-stirrin' up strife between masters and men. I likes you, sir, as I hope you'll excuse me for sayin' so," replied Mr. Maggs, with his face glowing with pleasure. And bringing down his hand on that of the little man with a smack that might have been heard in the garret, he added, "An' there's my 'and on your 'and, and I'll give him a good squeege for them words."

"By Gad, and I believe you're right!" said the little man, wringing the hand he held in his until both Mr. Maggs and himself showed signs of fatigue. "Now, as we are friends ——"

"Certain'y, sir, now we're maties!" interrupted Mr. Maggs, rubbing his hands. "Quite right, sir; go on."

"Now we are maties," continued the little man, smiling, "I shall not hesitate to ask you to do me another favour, and I'm sure you won't refuse. I want you to go on an errand of mercy!"

"Most undoubtedly certain'y!" replied Mr. Maggs, slapping his knee. "I like that! Send me on a arrand of mercy, and I'm your man. Why it's Christmas Eve!" he continued, beaming on the little man like an overgrown and elderly cherub. "Aren't this day of all others the wery day for them arrands? It suits my idears uncommon. I'm your man, sir! Speak up, and don't be afeared!"

"Good, Maggs!" said the little man. "By Gad! I'll give you a mount any day you like, so I will. But to return. When I was set upon by those villains—and I wish we had 'em here this minute, we would show them what o'clock it is—I was coming

from visiting an old friend of mine, who is very ill and under the weather. Now the doctor won't let me out of this until late in the day I expect, so I wish you would go to him, and if you would also get in some wine and a few other knick-knacks for him, I should feel much easier in my mind."

"Sir," replied Mr. Maggs, rising from his chair, "I'm off! I may be a rum 'un to look at, but I'm a good 'un to go, considering my years *and* my legs. I'll fix his pantry and cellar in no time."

"Thank you, Maggs," said the little man. "Here is the address—Mr. Joseph Wright, St. Stephen Street, Salford. Do you know it?"

"I've swept his chimbley," Mr. Maggs replied with a nod.

"Then you'll want some money to make a few purchases," said the little man. "Where's my trousers?"

"No manner o' use, I spec!" Mr. Maggs answered. "Them rogues as tried to settle you, took care to empty your pockets, I warrant."

"So they did," said the little man in perplexity. "What the deuce shall I do?"

"It's all right, sir," Mr. Maggs replied, turning round from the door and slapping his hand on his breeches pocket. "It's all right, sir!"

"Then mind you come back again, and let me hear how my poor old friend is going on," said the little man; "and be sure you tell him the reason why I send you, and do not go myself. I'll ask Goodfellow to follow you immediately."

"Certain'y, sir," Mr. Maggs answered. "I'll tell him."

"Then good morning, Mr. Maggs, and God grant you're not too late. Poor Joe! poor Joe!" said the little man.

"Amen! to that there," replied Mr. Maggs, solemnly. "I wish you a good morning, sir."

When Mr. Maggs got into the street it was yet early morning and the snow had begun to fall in heavy flakes; but notwithstanding the cold and the seasonableness of the weather, as he expressed it, numbers of rough men and dissipated-looking women were hanging about the corners of the streets, beguiling the time before the hour of execution with loud conversation and obscene songs.

"A terrible Christmas for that poor wretch, and a hard time for poor creatures as are in the grip of poverty," he sighed, as he buttoned his coat closer about him. "I'd best step out brisk, for it's but bad company hereabouts."

When he left Brazennose Street it was yet too early to purchase what Mr. Seedly had instructed him to do, and as the shops would not be opened for two hours more, he made his way as quickly as possible to St. Stephen Street. The slipshod girl opened the door to him, and on his informing her he had been sent by Mr. Seedly, she at once showed him into the sick-room.

"Who is it?" the sick man asked, as he lay gasping for breath.

Mr. Maggs walked softly on his toes towards the bed, and whispered, "It's me, sir! I'm come from Mr. Seedly."

Poor Wright looked at him earnestly for a moment, and a humorous glance shot from his dark eyes.

"You are not the medical man, are you?" he asked, huskily.

"No, sir!" Mr. Maggs whispered; "he'll be here directly though."

There was silence for some minutes in the room, which at length was broken by the sick man coughing violently. When he had somewhat recovered his breath, he said, "I'm afraid it will be too late when the doctor comes. You think so too, don't you?"

"You're wery, wery bad," replied Mr. Maggs, shaking his head. "But you are in His hands, you know, and He'll do what is best."

"Where is Silas?—Mr. Seedly I mean," Wright gasped, after a pause. "He said he would come back. It would have been some consolation to have breathed my last breath with him by my side."

"He would have been here," Mr. Maggs replied, "if he was able. He was chucked into the river last night by some wagabones, and was in bed when I left him a little while ago. He told me particler to tell you as how nothin' should have kep him away if he was able to come anyhow."

"Has he been hurt?"

"Nearly drownded!" Mr. Maggs answered, "an' would have been, too, out and out, if it hadn't been for our Tom."

"Poor fellow!" said the sick man in a whisper. "That must have been when leaving this place."

Mr. Maggs nodded.

"I wish I could have seen him but once more," he gasped. "Only once more."

"Indeed, an' I wish you could, sir," Mr. Maggs

said, "but if there's any message you'd like to send, I'll be sartain to give it to him."

Again there was silence in the room for some minutes. Wright lay back on the wretched bed, gasping and struggling for breath, while grim death stood at the head. Mr. Maggs saw the end was fast approaching. "It will be a terrible thing," he thought, "if this poor creature should go out of the world with anything on his mind." So at last he said, "Is there anything you would like Mr. Seedly to do, sir? I'll be sure to tell him."

The sick man gazed at him, but gave no answer.

Mr. Maggs waited patiently, thinking over everything which he thought could possibly disturb the last moments of the dying. At last a happy thought struck him, and bending over the dying man he whispered, "Have you made your will?"

Again that humorous look flashed across the sick man's countenance. He glanced round the miserably furnished room and then at his visitor; but seeing the look of intense earnestness on his face, he replied in a whisper, "Do I look like a man who has anything to leave? Does this place give you an idea of wealth?"

"But you may have some trifle or other as you would like to be give to some friend or relation, you know!" said Mr. Maggs. "I think every man ought to make a will, whether he's got anything or no. If he's got anything to leave, it will keep matters straight, and if he hasn't, it will keep his sorrowing relations from frettin' theirselves to death, all o' thinkin' he had somethink which they couldn't find out."

"That's a strange conceit of yours," whispered Wright. "I've a mind to indulge you."

"Do, sir!" said Mr. Maggs, eagerly; "you'll be all the easier for it."

"Can you write?" asked the sick man.

"A little bit," Mr. Maggs replied, modestly.

"Then if you will look in the top drawer of that old press in the corner, you will find some writing materials," he whispered.

Mr. Maggs brought the paper and pen and ink, and placed them on a chair by the side of the bed. He then went down on his knees, and after sucking the pen and wiping it on his hair, he placed his hand on the paper and laid his head on his arm.

"Now then, sir!" he said. "I'm ready. What shall I say?"

"It must be short," Wright replied. "Begin, 'This is my last will and testament.'"

"Yes," said Mr. Maggs, after some time. "I've got that down. We must make it short, for the paper is small, and my letters is so wery big that I shall get to the bottom right-hand corner in no time."

The sick man had raised himself up in the bed, supporting himself on his elbow. "Quick!" he said, wiping off the dew from his forehead. "I feel the hand of death on me. I give my dear wife's miniature, with which, I thank God, I have never in my greatest need parted, to my daughter Polly."

"Yes," said Mr. Maggs, raising his head from his arm, and wiping the pen on his hair. "I've got that."

"I also leave her my dear wife's wedding ring, which I now wear."

"Yes," said Mr. Maggs. "I'll see to that. Anything else?"

"No, that is all!" he answered.

"No watch or any little trinklets, sir?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"No! They are all gone."

"Sold?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

"No! not sold."

"Poor fellow," said Mr. Maggs. "I see. They're up the ——" he finished the sentence by pointing the thumb of his right hand over his left shoulder.

The other nodded.

"There's the dooplicates!" Mr. Maggs observed, after a moment's reflection. "Where are them?"

The dying man pointed to the drawer from which the writing materials had been taken.

"Leave 'em to Polly, too?" inquired Mr. Maggs.

Again he nodded.

"Is there anything else?" asked Mr. Maggs.

"Nothing!" he gasped. "Nothing."

For some few moments Mr. Maggs remained silent in thought, endeavouring the whole time to assist the mental process he was going through by biting the end of the penholder. At length he said to himself, "Hang me, I'll do it! It's Christmas eve, and there'll be a blessing on it, I'm sartin."

He then turned to the dying man, and said, "There's Polly, sir. I spec she's all alone in the world if you should go. Better put her in the will too. You can leave her to me, an' praps it'll be a sort of a comfort to you."

Poor Wright looked at Mr. Maggs in silence, and a tear rose to his eyelid, and fell rolling down his wasted cheek.

"I'm not much of a feller, I know, sir, to have charge of a young lady, but my missus is a good 'un, and would take right good care of her," Mr. Maggs said. Then seeing the dying man still remained silent, he added, "No offence, sir. Suppose you leave her to Mr. Seedly, then! He *is* a gentleman."

The dying man reached forth his emaciated hand and grasped that of the honest little sweep. "I leave her," he said, in a hoarse trembling voice, "to the tender mercy of our Father in Heaven."

"An' a wery good one to leave her to, too," Mr. Maggs replied, as he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "You couldn't do better. *He'll* be a father to the orpharn, accordin' to His promises, I'll warrant."

After a short time, Mr. Maggs said, "Is she the only one, sir? Have you any more young 'uns? If so, please name 'em."

"I—I don't know," the dying man gasped with eagerness. "I—believe—I have. Our first child —my beautiful Katey—they said—died. Come closer. She was—placed out at nurse—when my dear wife was ill. They said she died—but I never saw her body. They had buried—the body—before I could see it. I believe now, in my last moments, they lied;—and my child—was sold to replace—another. A mole—on the side of the left ankle—the little toe of the left foot—absent—cut off by accident at her birth. Write it down. My blessing on them."

Mr. Maggs wrote down these words, and placing the paper on the crown of his hat, gave him the pen to sign. He then signed his own name as witness.

The dying man now sunk back on the bed exhausted. Mr. Maggs saw the end was at hand, and bending over him, he whispered, "Shall I call in Polly?"

"Yes! yes!" he replied.

Mr. Maggs left the room, and in a moment returned, leading by the hand a young child of about ten years of age, who was bitterly weeping.

"Don't 'ee cry, my pretty dear," Mr. Maggs, whose own eyes were wet, said. "Go to your par!"

She immediately went and knelt by her father's bedside, and taking his hand covered it with her tears.

"Polly," he gasped, "come closer and kiss me. I can't see you! Closer my darling!"

The child laid her head on his breast and sobbed convulsively.

He placed his hand caressingly on her head and smoothed her brown hair. His lips moved, and Mr. Maggs, bending over him, heard him whisper, "Oh, heavenly Father, bless and protect her; and if it be that my first-born be alive, watch Thou over *her* and bless *her*."

Again there was silence—solemn and deathlike—in the room, broken only by the sobs of the child and Mr. Maggs, for he was sobbing too. The dying man's eyes were closed as if in sleep, and Mr. Maggs thought all was over. Presently, however, he saw his lips move, and placing his ear closer to him, he heard him whisper, "Can—you—pray?"

"Not much, I'm afeard!" Mr. Maggs replied,

sobbing. "I can't say 'em right off out o' book wery well, but if you like I'll say the Lord's Prayer, and that's the wery best I ever heerd."

"Do!" gasped the dying man.

Mr. Maggs knelt down by the bedside, and, in the presence of death, fervently repeated, in a voice broken by his sobs, the Lord's Prayer: "For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

"Amen!" repeated a voice behind him.

Mr. Maggs looked up, and saw the doctor standing by the bedside with his head bent on his breast.

"Take the child away," he said, laying his hand on Mr. Maggs's shoulder. "He is dead."

At that moment the clock of the Old Bailey boomed out, solemn and awful, the hour of eight.

Mr. Maggs carried the weeping child from the room, and gave her in the charge of the slipshod servant, whom he found on her knees crying outside the door. When he returned he showed the doctor the will he had made.

"You had better hand it over to Mr. Seedly," the doctor said. "He will do what is necessary. Take the few things mentioned in the paper, and hand them over to him too. I'll go now. My errand is to the living, not the dead."

"What's to pay?" said Mr. Maggs, in a whisper, placing his hand in his pocket.

"Nothing here, my good lad," the doctor replied, kindly. "I humbly trust it will be placed to my credit account in a bank where neither moths nor rust shall corrupt, and into which thieves shall not break through and steal."

"Certain'y, sir," Mr. Maggs replied, in a whisper. "I humbly hope so too."

When the doctor had left the room, Mr. Maggs put together the two or three trifles the dead man had possessed, together with the pawn duplicates. Among those trifles was the miniature of the dead man's wife. Mr. Maggs gazed at it long and earnestly. It was that of a beautiful young face, with wondrous grey eyes and masses of the blackest hair.

"I've seed that 'ere face somewhere," said Mr. Maggs to himself. "Wherever was it? I shall hit it by-and-by. I'd a-knowed it among a million."

The affairs of the dead man were soon settled, his small bills paid, and the undertaker instructed to perform the last office. Then Mr. Maggs returned to the house of mourning, and taking the orphan in his arms, he kissed her, and said, "Come, my purty dear! Come along o' me. You are left to the marcy o' God, and if it be His pleasure, I'll be His instrument. Come along o' me, deary!"

END OF VOL. I.

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